

PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT 2007 to 2008^{1,2}

As President of Bird Protection Quebec, it is my great pleasure to present to you the annual report for the year 2007 to 2008.

We like to boast that we are much more than just a birdwatching club, and I hope to be able to demonstrate to you that our activities and accomplishments do indeed make us a significant force in conservation and nature education in the Montreal region and indeed in all of Quebec.

Our Mission Statement says that our goal is “to promote and support the awareness, appreciation, understanding and protection of birds and their habitats”. We interpret that to mean, as our logo says: Conservation, Education and Observation. Let's go through these goals, one by one, and see what we've done in the past year, to achieve them.

Conservation

Under the rubric of conservation we group the work of the Conservation Committee, the Sanctuaries Committee including the Philipsburg Sanctuary, Property Acquisition, the Hawk Watch, Christmas Bird Counts and Support Grants Committees.

The most significant event in this department last year was the finalization of the acquisition, from *Les Frères de l'instruction chrétienne*, of more than 100 acres to add to the jewel of our eight sanctuaries, the George H. Montgomery Bird Sanctuary at Philipsburg. The Philipsburg Committee, Property Acquisition and Sanctuaries Committees were all involved in this, as was the Treasurer and our friends at the Nature Conservancy of Canada who helped us with the negotiations and the application for government funding. We are thrilled to be able to conserve in perpetuity this additional property which hosts several endangered species of birds and plants. A management plan for the Sanctuary has been approved, and last year the Conservation Committee organized the second year of a Breeding Bird Survey in which close to 100 species were identified as definitely or probably nesting there.

In addition to this work, the Sanctuaries Committee visited our Piedmont and Alderbrooke Marsh properties, the first time for some years, and have begun to collect together in one place all the documents and information pertaining to the lands we own. Their laudable plan is to visit every Sanctuary on a regular basis, starting with the Varennes islands in spring 2008.

Part of the job of conservation includes finding out what birds are where, and approximately how many there are. In this regard, the Hawk Watch continues to make a valuable contribution to the knowledge of the migration of North American raptors – Mabel McIntosh and Bob Barnhurst have accumulated an amazing 30 years of data and have been widely recognized for their efforts. One thing their data are being used for currently is in environmental impact studies in connection with the building of wind farms in Quebec.

During the Christmas season we join the hundreds of birding clubs around the continent conducting censuses of the birds appearing in our area at that dim time of the year: one in

¹ as presented to the Annual General Meeting May 5, 2008

² full committee reports can be found at http://www.pqspb.org/ann_reports.html

Montreal, one in Hudson. It can be cold and miserable for us, but at least we can go back to chilli and a glass of something warming. The birds can't.

Members of the BPQ monitor bluebird boxes, Bobolink populations, provide seed for the feeders at the Arboretum and the Driscoll-Naylor Sanctuary, and survey bird populations at golf courses, encouraging them to be bird-friendly.

Our society is directly responsible for all the activities I have mentioned so far. But we recognize that other organizations work very effectively toward conservation and we reserve a small part of our budget to support some of them. Last year we gave money to three projects, one for responsible hunting of Murres in Newfoundland, one to Bird Studies Canada for an owl monitoring network for Quebec, and one to Le Nichoir to support employee education.

Education

Sadly, we no longer have premises to which we can invite school, scout and other groups for talks and activities. Nonetheless, through the Education Committee, Monthly Meetings and Membership Services, we have carried on the 'education' part of our mission with distinction.

The Education Committee took two groups of children on extended field trips, one to Baie-du-Febvre to see the Snow Geese and other waterfowl, the other to Île-Bizard. The committee also supported an animator to work with the children attending Camp Tamaracouta last summer.

On the adult front, Membership Services organized a winter birding course, helping members and non-members better understand identification and bird behaviour concepts. The Education Committee regularly responds to requests for talks to adults and children, mainly about backyard birds. Monthly Meetings draw up to 70 members and guests to hear speakers on a wide variety of topics, from urban renewal and the cat/bird problem to research on specific species like the Red-breasted Merganser and the Bobolink.

We reserve a small part of our budget to provide funds for formal research into Quebec ornithology. The Research Grants Committee has urged the Board to consider increasing the amount of money available for this purpose, but at the moment it stands at \$6,000. In the last financial year, that was enough to support one PhD student in her research project on kestrels, an owl monitoring project at the Tadoussac Bird Observatory, and a research project on Ruby-throated Hummingbirds.

Observation

The Field Trips Committee are our point men for the 'Observation' leg of our mission. A total of 39 outings were organized, with approximately 500 birders taking part, led by 17 different leaders.

For the fourth year in a row, Sheldon Harvey organized a "Summer Series of Birding" on weekends from mid-June to late August, and Kyra Emo coordinated the six Jim Houghton Memorial Spring Warbler Walks at Summit Park in Westmount.

As part of the society's 90th anniversary celebrations, several of our regular outings were dedicated to the memories of deceased members who were closely associated with the sites visited: Jo Wright and Marg Hendricks in Hudson, Alf Kelly in Piedmont, Mary and George

Montgomery and Betsy Barber at Philipsburg, and Elsie and Ed Norsworthy in Mount Royal Cemetery.

The Field Trip Committee reserved camping sites at Point Pelee in early May (175 species), Membership Services organized a long weekend in Tadoussac for 18 BPQ members (63 species) and Alison Bentley took eight members on a camping/cottage trip to Presqu'île Provincial Park in Ontario (113 species).

We're not usually competitive about our bird observations, being at least as interested in watching bird behaviour as in simply ticking and moving on. However on the occasion of our 90th Anniversary we did hold an intensely competitive Big Year, beautifully organized by Barbara Szabo, Richard Gregson and Sheldon Harvey. We were very pleased with the interest and participation shown by our own members and by many birders outside our club – it was a great exercise in outreach. Some notable stats for the Big Year: most species seen during the year (2007) – 266, by Mark Dennis; second most species was just one fewer, submitted by Olivier Barden who also won the Big Month prize with 210 in May and the Big Day prize with 174.

Behind the Scenes

The activities I've described so far are the noticeable ones, the ones we're most proud of, that keep our members active and interested and that advance our mission.

But to get them done, we have to have a strong set of 'backroom boys - and girls'. These are the committees that make sure we're well-known in the community (Marketing and Communications), that our members are well-served (Membership Services and Awards), that our finances are responsibly, accurately and legally looked after (Finance) and that our 'institutional memory' is preserved (Archives and *tchébec*).

The Executive Committee has the job to monitor all our activities and act as a steering committee for the Board of Directors.

The Marketing Committee's continued efforts to raise the public profile and the media's awareness of Bird Protection Quebec proved successful this past year, with a number of TV, radio and newspaper interviews being secured. Focus for the next year will be to produce a handsome booklet to publicize the society. Communications have perhaps been subject to more change than any other committee over the past few years, with the increased importance in all our lives of the internet. Our website gets between 50 and 100 hits a day, the group email, with 220 subscribers, keeps us up-to-date with breaking bird news, the e-Newsletter reaches about 75% of the membership with quick and very timely announcements, and our beloved newsletter makes us all feel part of a vibrant, engaged family.

Membership Services is a large committee, as you can see, and it needs to be. It was very busy last year, spearheading the 90th Anniversary celebrations, especially the fabulous dinner held in November for 125 members and guests. A truly memorable occasion. This committee looked for, and found, in the premises of the Knox Kensington and Presbyterian Church, a very satisfactory replacement for the Fraser-Hickson Library when that institution's auditorium was no longer available to us for monthly meetings. Membership Services also looks after the items for sale at the monthly meetings, organizes a popular and instructive winter bird course and helps and supports our Membership Secretary keep track of renewals, new members, changes of address and the myriad duties of that position.

Awards speaks for itself and I offer my congratulations to this year's winners.

Archives and *tchébec* may seem a bit dusty and dry, but they are amazingly important for a 90 year old institution. We want and need to be able to look back over the years and have an accurate account of all the good things we have done and when, and who was responsible.

We became particularly aware of this last year when we were celebrating the Society's 90 years and the people who had been so important to it over that time. On the night of the dinner, Michael Spencer, President of BPQ from 1987 to 89 and one of its most illustrious members, proposed a toast to the society.

We should feel proud and pleased to be members of an organization which does so much good and has so much fun doing it.

A huge vote of thanks to all whose names were on the screen at the AGM and the many many others who aren't officially on committees, but still work hard to make the society the great institution it is. We couldn't function without our many volunteers – in fact, we're all volunteers.

At this time I would like to formally thank Chris Murphy and Dave Mulholland, on behalf of the Board and all the members of the society, for their many years of service on the Board and its committees. Both Chris and Dave have been involved in almost every facet of the society for longer than they probably wish to remember. They are leaving the Board this year, but we hope and trust they will retain their active roles in our work and play and that they may even return to the Board in the future.

Eve Marshall
President