

# Celebrating Birds!

The birders are coming!

Every spring for the past 26 years, birders from around the world migrate to MacGregor Point Provincial Park to celebrate birds, birding and nature. And this year is no different. Over two -four-day weekends, May 24 to May 27 and May 30 to June 2, the internationally recognized Huron Fringe Birding Festival (HFBF) will feature over 90 events that will enthrall both bird enthusiasts and those who can't tell a barn swallow from a bald eagle.

As Norah Toth, Chair of the Huron Fringe Birding Festival Committee, puts it, "The Festival is a celebration of spring, when the forests and fields along the Lake Huron shoreline and up into the Bruce Peninsula are bursting with migrating and nesting birds. Anyone with an interest in learning more about birding, botany, geology or the cultural history of this area, will be sure to find the Festival interesting, informative and fun!"

Birding is big business. Thanks in part to the COVID years, which saw a surge in outdoor hobbies, and the movie, *The Big Year*, about a competition among birders to identify as many species of birds in a single calendar year as possible, birding has become one of the fastest growing recreational activities in the world. In Canada and the U.S. alone, it is estimated to contribute more than 70B\$ to the economy annually.

And it's an activity for every age. While Baby Boomers and Generation Xers represent the largest group of bird watchers, studies show that birding is growing in popularity with everyone, aged 6 to 86.



**An American Redstart, the mascot of the Huron Fringe Birding Festival.**

*Photo Courtesy of the Huron Fringe Birding Festival Committee.  
Photographer: Doug Martin.*

This year it boasts an incredible 90+ events. Events with names like Sex and the Single Warbler, Birder Murder Mysteries, Beaks and Brushes, Birding on the Fringe, Magical MacGregor, Birds of the Bruce, Birding 101, Exploring Nature with a Camera, and After Dark in the Park. Running in the mornings, afternoons and evenings, participants can choose to attend one event, some, or enjoy a full-Festival package. And all of the events are led by local, provincial and global experts. Morning coffee and noon-hour BBQ lunches are also available daily, says Norah, and participants can stay in nearby towns or camp in MacGregor Point Provincial Park

*by Doug Archer*

along the beautiful Lake Huron shoreline.

While the base for the HFBF is MacGregor, events explore not only the niches of the provincial park, but venture along Lake Huron's shoreline, both north and south, essentially following what is known as the 'Huron Fringe', an area left behind by a prehistoric glacial lake called Algonquin.

Internationally renowned, people come from around the world to attend the HFBF, Norah tells me. "We have had birders from India, Australia, Brazil, and, of course, from across Canada and the United States. And no one who comes is disappointed. Over the years of the Festival, more than 250 different species of birds have been spotted!"

It's not just birds and binoculars, either. The opening Saturday of the Festival, May 25th, features a dinner banquet, silent auction, and a keynote presentation by a punk rock birder named Paul Riss.

A legend on the Ontario birding scene, Paul embarked on his own Big Year in 2011 – and tattooed the name of every bird species he spotted on his body. More than 240 of them! Needless to say, he caught people's attention and has since used that celebrity to advocate for winged creatures. He was recently featured in the CBC documentary, Rare Bird Alert, where he journeyed across North America and explored how climate change is affecting birds.

"Of course, none of these events, dinners and keynote speakers would be possible without the support of our volunteers and sponsors," says Norah.

Partnering with Friends of MacGregor Point Park (a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the educational, recreational and research opportunities at MacGregor Point Provincial Park), the Festival receives generous support from businesses and organizations within the community. "Companies like Bruce Power and Ontario Power Generation, as well as Quest Nature Tours, Vortex, Southampton Rotary, Hills Insurance, and so many more."

And Norah can't say enough good things about the volunteer members of the organizing committee and the time and energy they dedicate to the HFBF. "The committee spends an entire year planning for the Festival," she points out. "And when the Festival begins, countless more volunteers come out to support the committee members in overseeing and supporting all the events." With a smile she adds, "Of course, we can always use more volunteers. Especially new members on the committee."

So, whether you are a seasoned birder or a new comer to this growing hobby, grab your binoculars and camera and sign up for one of the many events offered by the Huron Fringe Birding Festival starting on May 24th. It could be the start of your own Big Year.

To register for a Festival event, visit [www.huronfringebirdingfestival.ca](http://www.huronfringebirdingfestival.ca) and follow the drop down menu. Those interested in volunteering, can contact Norah at [huronfringebirdfest@gmail.com](mailto:huronfringebirdfest@gmail.com).



**Dave Brewer showing a Cedar Waxwing to fellow birders.**

*Photo Courtesy of: Sarah Smith*