

# BIRDING

## WITH Dan Clifflen

By Becky Bridger



When growing up surrounded by the sights and sounds of the local wildlife at his family cottage, Dan Clifflen probably didn't see himself becoming one of Brockville's foremost experts in the study of birds (ornithology) today. In 1989, after becoming more interested in birds from his days spent fishing, Clifflen took a course in bird watching at St. Lawrence College. This began a lifelong love of all things bird related, and years of self-study

to become an expert in this exciting field with thousands of different species.

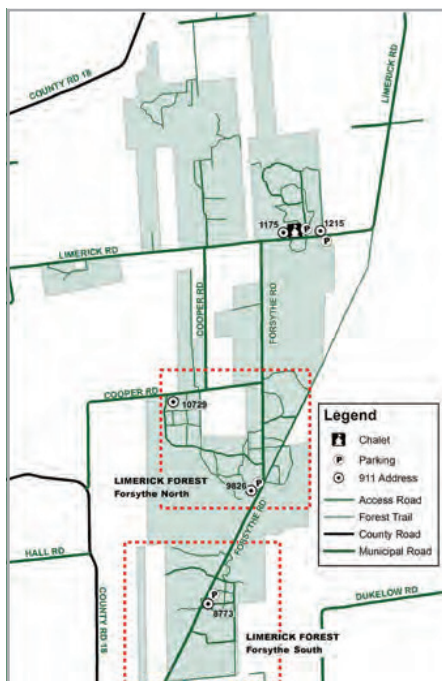
Clifflen says not to get overwhelmed by the number of species out there. As a novice birdwatcher, there are many ways to begin experiencing the excitement of simply getting out into nature and identifying various species of birds and fowl. The equipment required to begin bird watching is simple: a guide book, binoculars, a notebook to record sightings, and a sense of adventure. One can easily start in their own backyard identifying common birds in the area, such as Blue jays, Robins, and Chickadees.

Clifflen recommends the Peterson Field Guide as a beginning birdwatcher guide book as it clearly outlines all of the ideal things to look for in bird species with drawings. Clifflen explains that drawings are much easier to use in identification as you can focus on the bird itself, not the colouring, background, or perspective of when the photo was taken. Along with the Peterson Field Guide, Clifflen recommends that your binoculars be either 7x35 or 8x42 to better catch the birds either in flight, or up in the trees. Once your bird is spotted, you will want to take note of the five "S's" - size, shape, shade (colour), song, and sweep (flight pattern). Writing it down in your notebook

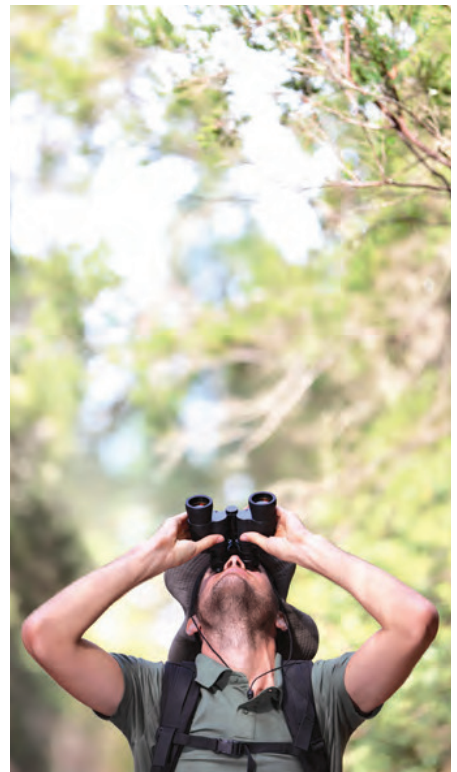
will make it much easier when you try to identify the bird in your guidebook.

Early spring is one of the most exciting times of the year to get out bird watching. According to Clifflen, the spring migration brings a high number of birds through our area. Not only can one see interesting species, but they are usually in full plumage and singing up a storm trying to attract a mate. Some of the earliest birds to look out for are the Horned Larks, Blue Birds, and Redwing Blackbirds. Clifflen says that the best time to see them is in the early morning when they are feeding (between 5am-9am), and just before nightfall. The birds enjoy an afternoon siesta, which is a great time to get out and enjoy identifying waterfowl. Although 5am might seem early, Clifflen says that you can still manage a great bird watching journey later on in the morning.

In Brockville, a great area to hike and canoe is the Mac Johnson Wildlife Area. Clifflen describes the trails as an easy walk for most people. There are also a variety of habitats (fields, wetland, and woodland), which will contain a diverse set of species. One can look for Redwing Blackbirds in the fields, Trumpeter Swans in the wetland, or Hooded Warblers in the woodland. You can find more information online at: [crca.ca/conservation-lands/conservation-areas/mac-johnson-wildlife-area](http://crca.ca/conservation-lands/conservation-areas/mac-johnson-wildlife-area).



Limerick Forest Trail Map



Like the Mac Johnson Wildlife Area, in the Township of Augusta, in the Village of Merrickville-Wolford, one can also find the Limerick Forest. These trails are quite a bit longer than those at the Mac Johnson, but they also include fields, wetland, and woodland habitats. Check out the Limerick Forest website for more information, including trail maps: [www.limerickforest.ca](http://www.limerickforest.ca).

For those who want to get out bird watching but do not have the time or mobility to walk a trail, Clifflen recommends driving through the back roads with the windows open. He said that you would be surprised at the variety of species just waiting off the sides of those country roads. As well, for those interested in waterfowl, our islands (only accessible by boat) are home to a variety of interesting species.

Although Dan Clifflen may be an expert in bird watching, he says that the “easiest thing for people to do is get out there with your book and binoculars. Don’t be intimidated and identify what you can. Next time you will learn another bird. Each time you will build on your knowledge.” With such portability, this is a hobby that the whole family is sure to enjoy. **LH**

THE FIVE “S”  
 OF BIRD WATCHING  
 Size ~ Shape  
 Shade (COLOUR)  
 Song  
 Sweep  
 (FLIGHT PATTERN)



Mac Johnson Wildlife Area Site Map

