

The Canadian Field-Naturalist

The Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club Awards for 2024, presented April 2025

ELEANOR ZURBRIGG, CHRIS ARCHIBALD, BETHANY ARMSTRONG, CHRISTINE HANRAHAN, RITA KLOOSTERMAN, BEV MCBRIDE, KAREN MCLACHLAN HAMILTON, and LYNN OVENDEN

The 2024 Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club (OFNC) awards were presented at the Club's Awards Night on 12 April 2025. Awards are given to members or non-members who have distinguished themselves by accomplishments in the field of natural history and conservation or by extraordinary activity within the Club. Four awards were conferred for 2024, for topics ranging from activities to initiate a new OFNC

Book Club, to service as the Ottawa regional coordinator for the Third Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, to outreach and education achievements for Safe Wings Ottawa, Bird Friendly Ottawa, and the OFNC, and lastly for significant contributions to the successful operation of the Club over many years, particularly in the area of governance, finances, and accounting systems.

Member of the Year Award: Jessica Sims

In recognition of the member judged to have contributed the most to the Club in the previous year.

It was in 2022 when Jessica Sims answered the OFNC's call for a new Book Review Editor for *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* (CFN). She loves reading, always having a stack of books lined up ready to crack open when there's time, and is interested in natural history. It seemed like a natural fit. However, it was in 2024, when she joined the OFNC Board that she wondered how, as a non-scientist, she could contribute to the Board as well as Club members in general. As Book Review Editor, she receives countless items from publishers such as lists of current titles, many of which are nature themed. This was when she thought of creating the OFNC Book Club.

Once the concept was introduced to the Board, the brainstorming began. It was decided that an online version would be best, at least initially, to eliminate concerns about the number of people who could attend and the problem of finding an appropriate venue. Then, she sorted out the logistics and created a format that would work for an online, multi-person Book Club to take place. By May 2024 the Book Club idea was presented, via an OFNC posting with an online survey, to determine if enough people were interested to warrant officially starting the club. By mid-June the answer was yes. The first event, in October, examined the book *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make our Worlds, Change our Minds & Shape our Futures* while the second, *Bitch: On the Female*

of the Species, occurred in January 2025. At that time ~90 people had registered for the Book Club, while 37 and 35 participated in the first and second events, respectively.

With the aim of engaging people with diverse viewpoints while maintaining a friendly environment, Jessica created a formula that proved to be successful. Each evening begins with a brief introduction to the book and to the evening's guest speaker. The guest speaker presents a short talk on a related subject which is followed by a question-and-answer session. Afterwards Jessica randomly divides the audience into smaller discussion groups consisting of six or seven individuals, allowing each group a chance to discuss the book. She also provides possible discussion prompts before each Book Club. After about 25–30 minutes, everyone reconvenes for closing comments and the revealing of the next book with the proposed meeting date. Each book is chosen by the Book Club member voting system.

Apart from launching the Book Club, Jessica was also busy with other Club activities. She encouraged local members to explore the possibility of reading about natural history on a wide variety of subjects in books not easily sourced in the usual bookstores or online. In one blog post, she suggested members to not only look at CFN but introduced, or reintroduced, the possibility of accessing recent natural history discoveries on subjects such as birdwatching, conservation, animal behaviour, and botany. She even gave step-by-step instructions on how to obtain the free

online access to this publication.

The Club would like to thank Jessica for envisaging the concept of an OFNC Book Club, for devel-

oping a formula that works, and for introducing this novel event to its members.

Prepared by Karen McLachlan Hamilton

George McGee Service Award: Aaron Hywarren

The George McGee Service Award recognizes Club members (excluding the board's executive members) for significant contributions to the smooth running of the Club and related activities over several years. The award commemorates George McGee who was a very active leader and educator for the Club for three decades. He was Club president from 1964 to 1966.

Ask 200 volunteers to cover 8600 km² over five years. Repeat the process every 20 years. That's what's behind Ottawa's contribution to The Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, which maps the distribution and relative abundance of the approximately 300 bird species that breed in the province. Many OFNC members join in, some going back to when the first atlas effort started in 1981. Breeding bird atlases are a foundational part of Canada's suite of bird population monitoring programs. Leadership is critical.

The OFNC is pleased to recognize Aaron Hywarren for his voluntary service as Region 24 (Ottawa) Coordinator for the Third Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas. In 2020, the provincial atlas coordinator asked the OFNC birds committee whom they could recommend for the job. Aaron sprung immediately to mind—someone multi-talented, with a certain persuasive charm.

Aaron's love of birds formed during his childhood on the Manitoba prairie. From there he grew to be the friendly, skilled birder we find in the field today. However, his call to Ottawa came via his other talents and education, which led to an admirable career in the Federal Public Service. While the subject matter was different, there was some skill overlap with the atlas. Organizing, communicating, leading, and team-building all come naturally to him. He is known to take great care with details, data, and people's morale.

A regional coordinator's commitment spans several years. Year five is just beginning. Aaron's roles include recruiting surveyors and assigning their cov-

erage areas, supporting volunteers to gather top quality data, promoting the Atlas, engaging landowners, liaising with technical and advisory committees, and collaborating with the provincial atlas project managers. Breeding season field work takes place over three-quarters of the year. In the off-season, coordinators review data, plan coverage, and rally observers for the next season. Aaron is also a busy field observer himself. For example, he's led special efforts to track down hard-to-find or sporadic breeding species such as Red Crossbills.

Aaron's frequent buddy in the field, long-time atlas volunteer Mark Gawn said:

The results speak for themselves. After the first four years the Ottawa region ranks as one of the best covered regions in the province. Be it in cajoling volunteers, dealing with irascible landowners, or instilling common sense into the proceedings, Aaron has proven time after time to have the right stuff. Come to think of it, all qualities greatly personified by George McGee; I can think of no one more worthy of an award made in George's name.

If Club members didn't already know him, they might have met Aaron in the winter of 2024 when a Western Tanager came to town for a long visit. Aaron served as an Ontario Field Ornithologists' Rare Bird Ambassador, helping to diplomatically oversee crowd management, and neighbourhood relations, while also updating the birding community on the bird's status and ensuring the overall welfare of the bird. Aaron is also a sector leader for the annual Ottawa–Gatineau Christmas Bird Count, including a continuing interest in monitoring the Ottawa East Crow Roost.

The OFNC thanks Aaron for his dedication and hard work to date, with best wishes and cheers for the final stretch.

*Prepared by Bev McBride
with contributions from others*

Mary Stuart Education Award: Janette Niwa

Presented to members, non-members, or organizations, in recognition of outstanding achievements in the field of natural history education in the Ottawa Region.

Birds face innumerable challenges in our world, particularly in urban areas where tall buildings and residential homes, often with large windows, create a deadly hazard. This deeply concerns Janette Niwa

who has long been creating awareness of the issue through education.

She is an active member of Safe Wings Ottawa (SWO) which she represents on the OFNC Board. Believing that education is the best way to spread the word, she participates in many events to publicize the perils birds face when navigating our cities. In 2024 alone, she attended nine events including the

Carp Fair and the Sandy Hill Eco-Fair, where she provided invaluable information on how we can provide safe passage for our feathered friends. During the first week of May, Janette leads a guided “Jane’s Walk” of downtown Ottawa to talk about bird friendly buildings, the history of Safe Wings, and how we could make homes and commercial buildings around Ottawa more bird friendly.

Recently, she updated and enhanced SWO’s display by creating infographics of some of the victims of window collisions. These contain detailed information about songbird migration, their habitats, etc. She also brings the SWO display to the annual OFNC Awards Night.

During her regular patrols in search of birds that have collided with buildings, she frequently takes along new volunteers, providing excellent hands-on training in how to find and rescue those birds.

Her role with SWO is manifold: she provides regular updates on SWO activities to volunteers, she is events coordinator for the group, and she helps maintain their database.

Janette’s concern for, and knowledge of, birds make her an excellent spokesperson, not only for SWO, but for the OFNC. In April 2024 she appeared on a CTV news segment about birds, discussing birding hotspots and how to get started in birding. She emphasised the OFNC’s “Birding Code of Conduct” along with how to keep birds safe from window collisions. As an

articulate and passionate birder, she did a superb job.

Janette was also SWO’s media contact for other news stories in 2024, involving several by Carleton University journalism students (such as the window collision death of the rare Western Tanager visitor). Additionally, she provided a pre-recorded video to The Wildlife Society’s annual conference in Baltimore, USA, and participated online in the panel discussion that followed its presentation, on how birds perceive windows and how modifications could alleviate collisions. As well, she discussed strategies for building better partnerships, and how society could change its behaviour regarding bird protection, particularly in urban areas.

As if all of that is not enough, Janette has also been a great supporter of Bird Friendly Ottawa, an initiative of Nature Canada. She posts news and events from partner groups (OFNC, Ottawa Valley Wild Bird Care Centre, Wild Birds Unlimited, and SWO) on their Facebook page, as well as events and tips from groups such as Dark Sky International and the Ottawa Wildflower Seed Library.

For her wide-ranging work on bird conservation and educating communities through many and varied means, the OFNC is very proud to present the Mary Stuart Education Award to Janette Niwa.

*Prepared by Christine Hanrahan
and Deborah Doherty*

Honorary Member: Ann MacKenzie

This award is given in recognition of outstanding contributions by a member, or non-member, to Canadian natural history or to the successful operation of the Club.

The OFNC’s long-term success in promoting the appreciation, conservation, and understanding of Canada’s natural history is due to not only the dedication of its members, but also to effective leadership, vision, and sustainable financial practices.

Ann MacKenzie exemplifies all of these qualities and has been an outstanding leader on OFNC’s Board over the past 20 years. She has made, and continues to make, extensive contributions to the successful operation of the Club. Ann was a long-time member (joining in 1989) before she joined the Board in 2006 and then took on various roles: President (2010–2013), Director (2013–2017), Past President (2014–2016), Treasurer (2017–2024), and Chair of the Finance Committee (2006–2011; 2024–present day).

In her focus on the Club’s governance, finances, and accounting systems, Ann has been an innovative and visionary leader who put key infrastructure pieces in place to help the Club run successfully now and for

many years to come.

On the governance side, Ann held several workshops to address challenges facing the Club related to the role of the Fletcher Wildlife Garden and the production and finances of CFN. Recognizing the need for first-time Board Directors to become familiar with their role and expectations, Ann developed an online handbook with key documents, processes, and policies in 2016. Updated annually, it ensures that new directors have the information required to fulfill their responsibilities and serves as a repository of corporate memory. Ann also developed the first draft of new By-Laws of the Club’s constitution to comply with the 2010 *Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act*; these were the basis for the work on the new Articles and By-Laws accepted at the 2024 Annual Business Meeting (she worked closely with Ken Young).

Ann also used her education (MBA Finance and Accounting) and skills gained as a senior manager in government to put the Club on sound financial footing and to promote financial professionalism and accountability within the Club. This was accomplished by

several initiatives to modernize the Club's processes and systems: increasing membership fees in 2006, modifying the accounting system to better meet the Club's needs and allow for greater oversight by the Treasurer and Chair of the Finance Committee, and creating a finance/treasurer team to share the workload. She also developed several policies related to financial matters including the Funding Request Policy, Investment Guideline Policy, Financial Aspects of Out-of-Town Trips, and the Policy on Applying for a Grant. She established new accounting processes to

ensure timely financial statements were provided to Board members for review and brought in online services for the processing of fees, bill payments, and the issuance of tax receipts. This was especially beneficial during the pandemic.

For her leadership and contributions to the Club's long-term successful operation and financial sustainability, the OFNC is very proud to present the Honorary Member Award to Ann MacKenzie.

Prepared by Rita Kloosterman