

Thickson's Woods Warbler Survey 2015 Summary



Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Mike McEvoy*)

Thickson's Woods stands on a low sandstone cliff on the very edge of the north shore of Lake Ontario. Its tall White Pines, visible for kilometres, form a welcome landmark for northbound migrants crossing the lake each spring. In calm, sunny weather many small birds, including warblers, fly north, straight overhead without stopping, in their rush to reach their breeding grounds. But facing cold north winds, or a thunderstorm, or an unexpected thick fog bank, large numbers often drop down to earth, into the shelter of the woods to rest, recuperate, and feed furiously to build energy for their onward journey. Thickson's Woods is one of the very best places to see warbler migration in all of Ontario.

Regular counts of 21 common wood warblers were carried out in the woods from May 1 to June 5 every year from the 1980s until the early 2000s as part of the Toronto Ornithological Club's annual Ontario Spring Warbler Migration study. The data collected has provided invaluable, detailed information on the rise and fall of species populations, average arrival dates, and migration patterns.



Blackburnian Warbler (*Mike McEvoy*)

The last of these Thickson's Woods warbler counts was done in 2001, but it seems a most worthwhile project for the Matt Holder Environmental Education Fund to take up, especially with such a wealth of historical data for comparison. Dennis Barry has put together an excellent protocol and guidelines for the survey, suggesting data-gathering on 29 warbler species, to include not only the commoner species but also those like Golden-winged Warbler that are becoming of provincial concern. Similarly, additional counts of Whip-poor-will, Common Nighthawk, and Olive-sided Flycatcher, all aerial foragers in decline, could be extremely useful in following their fortunes.

So if you would like to enjoy the amazing sight of trees full of jewel-coloured warblers on a cool spring morning, and share in this fascinating natural history project, do let us know. Only one warning: warbler-watching can become an intensely addictive occupation!






Margaret Bain

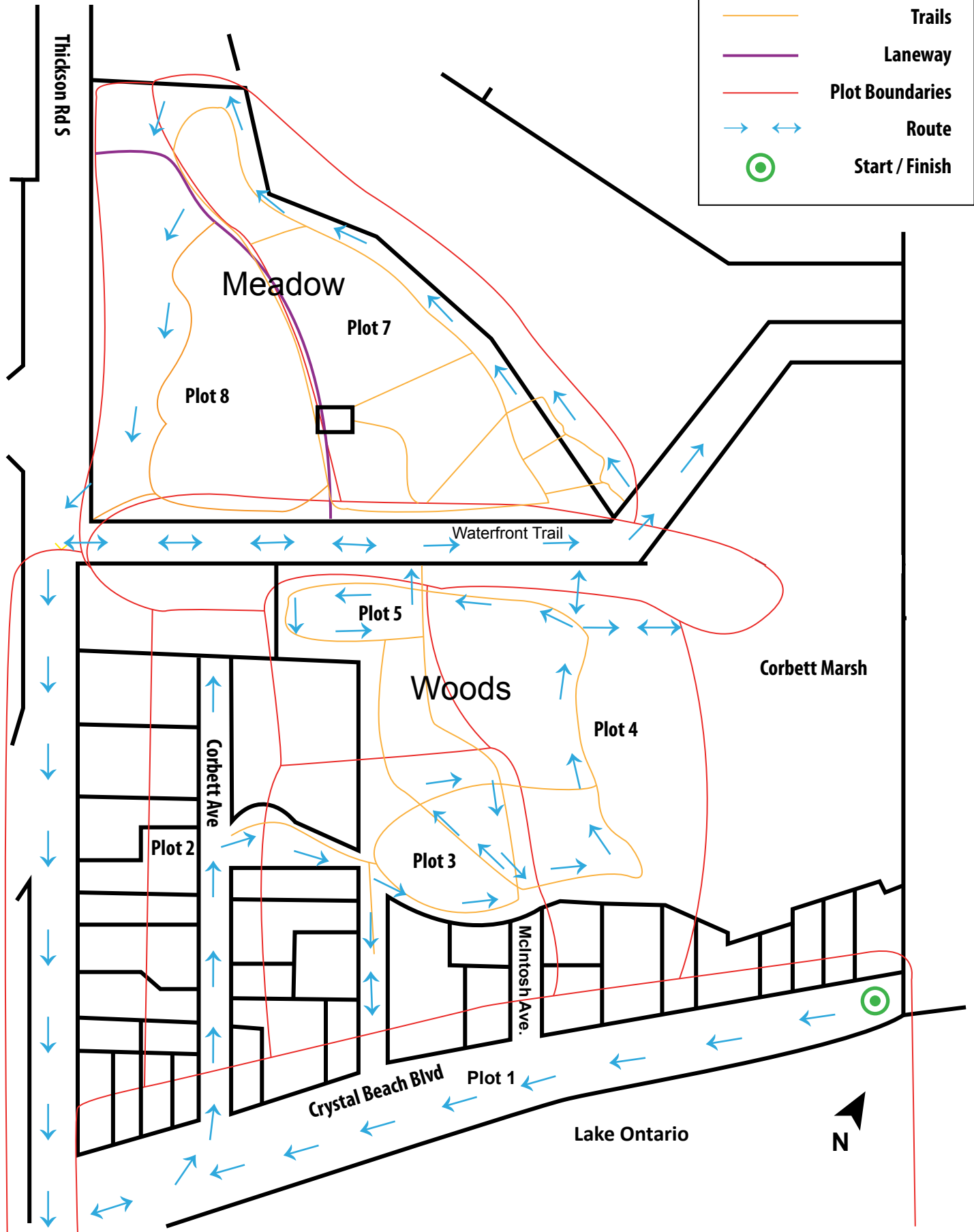


Black-throated Green Warbler (*Mike McEvoy*)

Thickson's Woods Nature Reserve

Warbler Survey Route

L E G E N D	
	Trails
	Laneway
	Plot Boundaries
	Route
	Start / Finish





Blackpoll Warbler (*Mike McEvoy*)

After an unusually cold winter and somewhat late spring, weather was remarkably consistent during May, 2015. Only one day was rainy enough in early morning to delay the count. Winds were generally light to moderate, and skies were often clear. Very few days were foggy.

The first count was conducted on April 17 to evaluate the procedures and route. Two Yellow-rumped and one Pine Warbler were recorded.

It was May 2 before any other species appeared. New warbler species that day were Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Green, Palm and Black-and-white, none of which were found during the formal count. My notes indicate there were lots of midges, so any bird making it to Thickson's Woods would have been well fed. Leaves in the canopy were just starting to open and understory shrubbery leaves were 25% to 50% unfurled.



Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Mike McEvoy*)

By May 5 there were a number of male Yellow Warblers racing about the meadow trying to establish territories. By May 6 thirteen were recorded, with a peak of thirty-two birds found on May 12.

On May 8 Brandon McWalters had an early Tennessee Warbler and Dan Kaczynski reported the first Orange-crowned, a species that showed up more often than usual last spring.

By May 10 warbler diversity had increased to 16 species, with an early Canada being a highlight.

On May 11 the number of warblers had increased to 19 species, and with leaf cover now more than 50% both in the canopy and understory, 110 warblers were recorded as unidentified. The 122 that were identified included 7 Cape Mays, 18 Bay-breasted, an Orange-crowned, and a Wilson's.

May 12 was the top warbler day of the spring with thirty species found in the reserve, of which Glenn Coady spotted twenty-nine. Highlights included Cerulean, Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Connecticut and the first of an unprecedented number of Prairie Warblers that appeared last May. As is often the case with big fallout days at Thickson's, there had been heavy rain and strong winds around midnight. My notes indicate there was plenty of song at dawn, with a mix of male and female warblers, and lots of birds along the lakefront. Winds were southerly overnight, but had shifted to west by 6:55 a.m. when the count began. Due to the large numbers of birds present, it took ninety minutes to complete the count. 261 warblers were counted, but many more were certainly missed.

By May 20 species diversity had begun to drop. By May 31 the only warblers present were the resident Yellow Warblers in the meadow, three Blackpolls and a couple of yearling male American Redstarts singing near the north edge of the woods vainly trying to attract mates. It's almost time for the first warblers to appear in Thickson's Woods this spring. Revised tally sheets are being prepared. Sunrise and sunset charts are being printed. I'm interested to see when the full moon will be this May, and how it might affect migration. I hope you'll come join us for some counts this year. And don't forget to record your sightings in the binder in the green box along the south trail. You might be the lucky one to spot the first warbler of spring. dbarry@interlinks.net 905-725-2116

This article is taken from the Thickson's Woods Land Trust Newsletter 49 and is available from Dennis Barry at the above contact information.

