



**Brief submitted to the Public Hearings on the
*Schéma d'Aménagement et de Développement de
l'Agglomération de Montréal***

On behalf of Bird Protection Quebec

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A male American Kestrel (Faucon crécerelle), once very common in the Montreal Area and now scarce.
Photo courtesy of Luke Currin

Bird Protection Quebec (Protection des Oiseaux du Québec), the oldest conservation charity in Canada, protects birds and their habitats in Quebec. We organize field trips, lectures, and other educational activities, as well as acquiring and managing bird sanctuaries and supporting scientific research with annual grants. As such, we are particularly interested in aspects of the *Schéma* that have an impact on bird habitat.

Birds are as essential a part of our environment as the trees, natural spaces, and water, and provide important regulating ecosystem services such as insect control and pollination as well as being a strong cultural association for humans, and source of pleasure.

The North American Bird Conservation Initiative Canada's 2012 report, *The State of Canada's Birds, 2012*. (Environment Canada, Ottawa, Canada. 36 pages; ISBN 978-1-100-20674-5) reveals that numerous bird species, particularly aerial insectivores (swallows, nighthawks), grasslands birds (Bobolink, Upland Sandpiper), and marsh birds (Virginia Rail) are in decline. In some cases over 90 % of species populations have declined, largely attributable to loss and degradation of habitat.

It is also important to note that loss of habitat is not the only serious threat to birds caused by the expansion of the urban zone. Pets, feral cats, and collisions with windows, especially residential windows, cause hundreds of millions of bird deaths yearly in North America (www.flap.org).

On Saturday Oct 25th, 2014, Mayor Denis Coderre visited the Bois de Liesse Park in company of Green Coalition directors. In addressing the one hundred and fifty visitors who came to walk the trails with him, Mayor Coderre emphasized the importance of working together to combat climate change and protect our natural spaces. He insisted that cities have a very important role to play in a sustainable future for humanity.



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We congratulate the Coderre administration on their decision to raise Montreal's target for protected land to 8% (according to Green Coalition, only 5% is protected as of now). We urge you to act very quickly while it is still possible to attain this. Also, it would be wonderful to achieve this goal in time for the 375th anniversary of Montreal, which will also be the centenary of Bird Protection Quebec.

Several important areas providing habitat for nesting and migrating birds in Montréal are currently under threat. These include Angell Woods, Meadowbrook golf course, and the *Corridor écoforestier de la Rivière à l'Orme*. In addition, sites that are of high use by birds for breeding or migration on Montreal Island, yet are not recognized in the planning document as being of ecological significance, include western Pierrefonds in the Anse-à-l'Orme sector, the former Veterans' Lodge land in Senneville, and Green Heron Pond in the St-Laurent Industrial Park. A specific aim of Montreal's *Politique de conservation et mise en valeur des milieux naturels* (adopted some ten years ago), besides the overarching one of preserving biodiversity, is the conservation of habitat for raptors (Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, etc). The three previously mentioned unrecognized sites are well used by these raptor species.

Bearing in mind that Montreal has cherished objectives for residential development that it is not likely to relinquish, we suggest the following:

We urge you to ensure that Article 116 of the Loi sur l'Aménagement and l'Urbanisme is adopted as an integral part of the *document supplémentaire*. This would oblige municipalities to adopt conforming bylaws. Henceforth, municipalities could emit construction permits only for projects where infrastructure such as public roads, sewers, and water mains are already in place. Conversely, they could refuse to issue permits where there is no existing infrastructure. This would go very far towards achieving the *Plan métropolitain d'aménagement et développement* (PMAD) goal of concentrating residential neighborhoods. This more contained urban development is likely to preserve more natural habitat for birds and perhaps even lessen other sources of mortality.

We wish there was a plan to either re-naturalize the brownfields (i.e., former industrial lands which are now disused and contaminated to some degree), or to develop a trade system whereby landowners who hold lands valuable for birds and other fauna, such as the Meadowbrook golf course, Angell Woods, the former veterans' lodge property in Senneville, could relinquish these sites for conservation in exchange for brownfields, as well as receive aid to make them buildable. Federal and provincial programs have and may still exist for such recovery programs. It bears mention that almost 10% of Montreal Island falls into the category of brownfields, currently a large waste of land that holds great potential for future re-naturalization and infrastructure.

It would be good to limit noise and vibrations (point 4.8.3, page 158) near parks and natural spaces. Excessive noise has been shown to affect birds' breeding success, as almost all bird species use song for territory acquisition and breeding purposes.



This photograph was taken in May 2012 between the housing development in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue's north sector and the marsh to the east.

In the *Corridor écoforestier de la Rivière à l'Orme*, the part west of Anse-à-l'Orme Road in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue is designated *mosaïque naturelle*, meaning that development for housing can occur there (see Map 15).

Extensive flooding occurs there in spring, and indeed the land can stay waterlogged for most of the summer in some years. This may cause basement problems for human residents. However draining the land is not a solution because it would negatively affect the water table in the marsh that is protected, and is nesting habitat for Virginia Rails. Extreme caution should be exercised as a classic human-nature conflict may result!

We note that small parts of western Pierrefonds (just to the east of Anse-à-l'Orme Road – Map 15) are apparently to be protected in the center of the mega-high-density development planned in what are now fallow fields (Map 2). Again, we insist that wetlands must not be drained for development

purposes, particularly in areas which can provide habitat for raptors and other vulnerable birds (see various eBird Canada records).

Finally, we urge you to protect Meadowbrook Golf Course, an island of nature and biodiversity in the western part of Montreal.

Alison Hackney
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