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## Flyways, Highways, and Byways

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# Flyways, Highways, and Byways

by Andrew Bateman and Ella Tetrault



## About the Artists

Andrew Bateman is a documentary media artist and a Ph.D. Candidate in the Communication and Culture Program at York University and Ryerson University in Toronto. He also holds an MFA in Documentary Media. His research unravels the myriad connections between Toronto and the Canadian Arctic to rethink the visual lexicon of Arctic documentary film. His films have been screened in Toronto, Berlin, Hamilton, Edmonton, and Lunenburg, while his artwork has been featured in Bergen, Istanbul, Brussels, Berlin, and Toronto. He is the recipient of the Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Doctoral Scholarship.

Ella Tetrault is an artist and Ph.D. Candidate at York University where she holds an SSHRC Doctoral Award. She completed an MFA in Public Art and New Artistic Strategies from the Bauhaus University (2011–2013) and a B.A. in International Development from the University of Toronto (2003–2008). She is co-founder of the Fuller Terrace Lecture Series and founder of the former Miracle Baby Gallery in Oakwood Village, Toronto. She has exhibited in Canada, the United States, Poland, Greece, The UK, and Germany and in 2017, co-edited her first book with Konstanze Schütze and the NRW Forum in Düsseldorf, *Pizza is God*.

Peter Quincy Ng is a climate scientist, has been a postdoctoral fellow and has completed a Ph.D. in Environmental Science at the University of Toronto, where his dissertation concerned the potential migration of trees in Toronto's urban forest under climate change. Curious about the world around him, Peter spends his time contemplating human geographies, unusual plant forms while trying his hand at being a polyglot.

Justyna Werbel works both as an active visual artist and curator. She received her BDes in Industrial Design and is currently perusing her masters in the IAMD program at OCADU. Werbel's MFA thesis explores sonic awareness by interpreting audio recordings of sonic masses in motion, into large and small scale drawings to create a new way of investigating her drawing practice. She is exploring this practice through inhabiting and becoming sonically aware of her invisible topography, focusing on the body in a space that receives and produces sounds. She has both exhibited and presented in Poland, Germany, Israel, the Czech Republic, Uruguay, Brazil, India, and Canada.

Aaron Tucker is the author of the poetry collection *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (Book\*hug Press, Spring 2021) as well as the novel *Y: Oppenheimer, Horseman of Los Alamos* (Coach House Books) which was translated by Rachel Martinez into French as *Oppenheimer* (Éditions La Peuplade) in the summer of 2020. In addition, he is the author of *Irresponsible Mediums: The Chess Games of Marcel Duchamp* (Book\*hug Press) and *punchlines* (Mansfield Press). He is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Cinema and Media Studies Department at York University where he is an Elia Scholar, a VISTA doctoral Scholar and a 2020 Joseph-Armand Bombardier doctoral fellow.

Flora Terah is a Kenyan-Canadian award-winning author, a compelling storyteller, and a most sort inspirational speaker who shares her powerful lived experiences of undying human spirit to help advocate for women and girls' rights around the world. As a victim of horrible violent acts, the need for peaceful solutions is never far from her thoughts. She has combined her experience as a fundraiser, grassroots organizer, an educator and as a women and girls' right defender with experience as a survivor of violence to become a powerful role model for Human Rights defender in Canada and around the world.

# Flyways, Highways, and Byways

*Andrew Bateman and Ella Tetrault*

*Featuring Peter Quincy Ng, Justyna Werbel, Aaron Tucker, Flora Terah*

During a massive spring migration, while most humans are asleep, the airspace above Toronto is abuzz with over fifty million birds—sixteen times that of Toronto’s human inhabitants. Some of these birds, such as the Hudsonian Whimbrel, will rest along Toronto’s shoreline on Lake Ontario as it journeys from its wintering grounds on the coasts of South America to breeding grounds on the Canadian tundra. Other birds will take advantage of favourable wind conditions and silently pass over the city without stopping. As temperatures are more favourable, weather is calmer, and species are afforded some protection against predation at night, the Spring and Fall migration will predominantly occur when we are asleep, unheard, unseen, and unnoticed by city residents. The photographs included here are a preliminary attempt to bear witness to this elusive migration through an infrared critter camera (see Fig. 1–6).

Given that Toronto is home to three million people and one-hundred and eighty human languages with residents from all over the world, we wanted to use the quiet intersection of millions of birds flying over this city as a way to think about the myriad human and nonhuman entities that move into, through, and out of this city (birds, humans, trees, particles, information, insects, etc.).



Figure 1. Bateman, Andrew, and Ella Tetrault. *Night Birds 1*. 2021. Infrared Photograph.

On Thursday, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021, we held a storytelling event in collaboration with Andrés Jiménez, Urban Program Coordinator at Birds Canada, for his two-month-long bird migration festival called the Toronto Bird Celebrations. The event aimed to honour migration in all its colors with four stories about the many flows of migration into and through this City. Peter Quincy Ng looks at the movement of trees and their unlikely migration in relation to larger changes in our ecosystem; Justyna Werbel makes a case for deeper listening as she describes her artistic practice travelling from the city to the countryside to capture and visualize bird sounds; Aaron Tucker reads an excerpt from his book of poetry, *Catalogue d'oiseaux*; and Flora Terah talks about her mental illness after resettling in Canada as a political refugee. Below are excerpts of their stories, lightly edited for length and clarity.



Figure 2. Bateman, Andrew, and Ella Tetrault. *Night Birds 2*. 2021. Infrared Photograph.

### Justyna Werbel: Flyways to Highways<sup>1</sup>

I wanted to temporarily migrate to a place where I had little to no distractions, a sort of place with peace and silence where I could create my own nest. When I arrived in this place, I was confronted with everything but silence. A larger migration that has been happening for much longer than I have been living was going to become a part of my research and art practice. I decided to go to Mono, Ontario, and sit with the environment and make as many recordings as I could to then transcribe them into graphic notations. Then I created a visual composition through listening to my recordings over and over and over and over and over again.

In the morning I would wake up and there were maybe a few little peeps, like a little tiny, high, high pitched, almost like a one note: peep. Just one note and then all of a sudden that started to repeat over and over again. And then the sound would sort of collide and overlap and become four or five notes. The crickets weren't out yet . . . it was June and the grasses weren't very tall, but the trees had leaves on them, and when it was windy, there was a really lovely rustling sound. The sound escalated at around 520—it got really loud, and then it slowly started to teeter off. At its loudest point: that was the

indigo bunting; when it teetered off, the crows came and there was the squawking of the crows.

The nice thing about being in a rural space is that you become part of the system, and certain things happen for a reason. You know, the wind blows this way, and this happens; you walk through the field this way, and this happens—you can start to communicate with the things around you, as silly as that sounds. For example, I would walk down a hill of tall grasses chasing the sound of crickets in a particular area. I'd move towards that area and all of a sudden, those sounds would disappear. Initially, I was frustrated because I just kept chasing the cricket sounds until I realized I'd just sit amongst them quietly, silently, and that's when I think the best recordings began because they didn't know I was present. Yeah, it's good to sit in tall grass and do nothing for a bit, just sit and listen.



Figure 3. Bateman, Andrew, and Ella Tetrault. *Night Birds 3*. 2021. Infrared Photograph.

### Peter Quincy Ng: Byways for Trees<sup>2</sup>

I got into trees because I was interested in biodiversity and how this ties into where things grow and why—I was always curious about why certain species exist here and

why not in other places. In my research, I looked into what we should try to protect, what's local, and what are our priorities.

Trees move only if they can be established into an environment, and that's usually through seeds. There are different methods of dispersal for trees: one is through eating the fruit; the other would be getting carried by the wind. The problem is that trees move very slowly, our climate is moving very quickly, and we don't know what will happen with climate change. How will our land-use change? What new and invasive species are going to come in? What new insects are going to arrive? Three to four degrees won't precipitate a tremendous change in what our trees look like, but they will bring in new threats, such as invasive species, pests and diseases which typically do not survive colder winters.

Trees also provide a lot of habitats for different animals, birds, bacteria, and fungi, so trees themselves are an ecosystem. With the movement of these trees and different species, we're able to foster different levels of biodiversity. In Southern Ontario, for example, we have this unique environment called the Carolinian Forest, which very much resembles what happens in South Carolina. We will see a potential expansion of this ecosystem in Toronto if the dispersal of these trees succeeds and the area is suitable for their growth, because a lot changes when you go up north: there are changes in light, different soil, different land use, different ecological histories. We're also going to see conditions shift towards having a more deciduous environment. The potential we see in climate change is that we can move some of these trees we find in Southwestern Ontario and move them up here.



Figure 4. Bateman, Andrew, and Ella Tetrault. *Night Birds 4*. 2021. Infrared Photograph.

Aaron Tucker: Flyways of Love<sup>3</sup>

I cut across the square up the even stairs to la Palaise de Rumine  
to the top floor, the rotunda connecting two museum spaces  
long glass cases of taxidermied birds, predators  
posed on driftwood over labels & staring back  
spizaète, lanceolate screaming, imperial  
& royal eagles next to buzzards, roosters  
pheasants, small turtle doves & peacocks  
followed by seafowl, ten ducks  
a half dozen pelicans, brown, white  
next to condors that lumbered even in death  
a goliath heron, a long-billed sandpiper, hoopoe  
two flamingos, their necks in a heart  
then towering jabiru, stiff-legged marabou beside cranes  
hookbilled ibis alongside dualchrome penguins  
smaller stations on the walls  
for hummingbirds pinned like delicate bugs  
streaked parakeets, cartoonish toucans, “guêpiers” or wasp’s nests  
“rolliers,” a name without English translation  
its tiered blue plumage captured in diving precision  
multiple hornbills, the birds growing stranger, mythic  
untranslatable colours, raw of things  
a case labelled “Combattants” filled with nimble  
ardéoles & chevaliers  
owl after owl, uncanny in their unblinking assessments  
of le Grand Duc de Népal & Ascalaphe denoting royalty  
one posed with its talons sunk into a squirming wolf cub  
wings spread in menace, chest expanding  
but dead, conquered by the noise of civilization



Figure 5. Bateman, Andrew, and Ella Tetrault. *Night Birds 5*. 2021. Infrared Photograph.

### Florah Terah: Flyways of Refuge<sup>+</sup>

I came to Canada as a protected person because my life was in danger. What I was carrying with me were invisible injuries. I had Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and depression from the torture I had survived when I was abducted in Kenya and my only son was killed. I was telling people I'm okay—I kind of thought people were reading my mind. I couldn't take it anymore. I started getting these panic attacks and at the end of the day, I found myself in a hospital. A professional sat with me for a long time and convinced me to seek professional help. I started realizing there is power in speaking.

I started talking and feeling free to visit people that are going through grief; I felt free to visit new immigrants that are dealing with this cultural shock. I wanted to really emphasize to any person that relocates to any country: if you are dealing with trauma, address the trauma professionally, talk to a professional, otherwise, destroying your mental health is destroying your mental wealth—it's destroying your life.

In Africa, we believe that if someone invites you into their living room, you don't go to the bedroom to see if their beds are made. We came with this attitude that we have been invited to Canada and we are supposed to listen and do as they say. Immigrants are

going through a lot of anti-black racism within the system, the workplace, and a lot of immigrants do not want to speak because they are afraid of reprisal. I would say to them to speak about it because this is the only way we can shape our country.



Figure 6. Bateman, Andrew, and Ella Tetrault. *Night Birds* 6. 2021. Infrared Photograph.

### Conclusion

The ruby-throated hummingbird is about nine centimeters tall and migrates more than three thousand kilometers from its wintering grounds in Central America to its breeding grounds in much of the Northeastern parts of the US and the Southeastern parts of Canada. For the majority of these migrations, one-third of the journey is completed in one flight across the Gulf of Mexico. In order to make that flight, the ruby-throated hummingbird will double its weight and beat its wings 52 times per second while dodging tropical storms and avoiding turbulent seas. Andrés Jiménez, the Urban Program Coordinator at Birds Canada, feels that his own immigration from Costa Rica to Toronto mirrors this bird's biannual migration. Jiménez needed to save a large sum of money in order to travel to Toronto to start a master's degree. He succeeded and then found meaningful employment with Birds Canada, but it certainly was not without help from his community. He notes that the vast majority of immigrants arriving in Toronto

are not like birds of prey coasting high on tailwinds, “they’re more like small birds trying really hard not to fall in the ocean.”<sup>5</sup>

*Flyways, Highways, and Byways* is an attempt to think about migration by bringing disparate subjects together to highlight the myriad ways we are entangled with the feathered creatures passing through our city through difficult and seemingly impossible journeys. By creating a different pace and practice for listening, understanding the interconnected migrations of flora and fauna—however small, poetry, and creating support around the long-lasting trauma of asylum-seeking in Canada, we hope to create a cross-section of audiences interested in various aspects of migration, so that those inhabiting our skyscrapers, for example, can also empathize with those dodging our skyscrapers.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Werbel, Justyna. *Flyways, Highways, and Byways*. Curated by Andrew Bateman and Ella Tetrault. May 2021. [www.fhandb.ca](http://www.fhandb.ca). Transcript has been lightly edited. Werbel’s story discusses the creation of her visual series *To Become Day* (2019), which can be viewed here: <http://www.justynawerbel.com/to-become-dayseries-2019>.

<sup>2</sup> Quincy Ng, Peter. *Flyways, Highways, and Byways*. Curated by Andrew Bateman and Ella Tetrault. May 2021. [www.fhandb.ca](http://www.fhandb.ca). Transcript has been lightly edited.

<sup>3</sup> These verses were recited by Tucker at minute 48:40 of the event recording. They are excerpted from his larger book of poetry: Tucker, Aaron, *Catalogue d’oiseau*, Toronto: Book\*hug Press, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> This is a lightly edited version of the story retold from Terah’s memory at minute 34:35 in the event recording. A version of this story was previously published as “From Scars to Stars” in *Finding Refuge in Canada: Narratives of Dislocation*, edited by George Melnuk and Christina Parker, 43–48, Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Jiménez, Andrés. *Flyways, Highways, and Byways*. Curated by Andrew Bateman and Ella Tetrault. May 2021. [www.fhandb.ca](http://www.fhandb.ca).

#### References

Bateman, Andrew, and Ella Tetrault. 2021. *Flyways, Highways, and Byways*. [www.fhandb.ca](http://www.fhandb.ca).