

# Nipissing Area Bird Bash

## May 2017

*By Dick Tafel, compiler*

To those of us who watch them, birds prove so often their amazing uniqueness within our mammalian world - their delicacy, their extraordinary abilities, their nesting skills, their ability to navigate huge distances, their singing virtuosity, their beauty, their very variety. And birding at the end of May in our area can hardly be improved upon anywhere!

Accordingly, as per usual, a great May Bird Bash was experienced within the North Bay 50 mile district! Twenty stalwarts discovered 133 species of birds over their 24-hour periods. Having said that, it was a bit disappointing just how few shorebirds were evident. The high water levels may have caused that large contingent of Arctic nesting birds to decide to rest elsewhere on their northward flight. And so the total number of species seen was somewhat lower than average (138) for the past 14 years of the count.

As usual, we start with first birds seen for the year in rough taxonomic order. And that gets us to a family of 13 Red-breasted Mergansers, 12 of which were tiny ducklings, seen at Warren Lagoon by the Great Canadian Birdathon foursome of yours truly, Renee Levesque, Brent Turcotte and Lori Anderson, hereafter called the Tafel Team.

A Cooper's Hawk was identified by Gary, Connie and daughter Rachel Sturge just west of Powassan.

Perhaps strangely, the Killdeer is next upon the list. This normally fairly common plover was seen only by the Sturges and by the other weekend birdathon group of Marc Buchanan, Grant and Shirley McKercher, Sarah Wheelan and Fred Pinto, hereafter called the Buchanan Team. At Verner Lagoon, the latter bunch also observed a very striking female Red-necked Phalarope, the difficult identification to which was, via some good photographs by Grant, confirmed by others. This team also found a Great Black-backed Gull.

The Buchanan Team also heard the exciting Common Nighthawk - often missed locally these days - near the former information centre. It was seen and heard by the Tafel Team near Circle Lake within the city. The latter quartet also enjoyed the fascinating sounds of a Whip-poor-will at the Dreany Lake area. Both groups and Steve Pitt spotted the phenomenal Chimney Swifts at their favourite roosting chimney on Main Street West.

Exciting Ruby-throated Hummingbirds have amazingly arrived from their winter home in Venezuela, seen by many participants, including Peter and Pam Handley, Helen

McCombie and Doug Patterson.

A rare Black-backed Woodpecker was discovered by the Sturge threesome on Stillaway Line west of Powassan.

Then we get to the flycatchers – seven of them having recently arrived (along with the flies?). Olive-sided with their *quick three beers* song was spotted at Laurier Woods by both birdathon groups; Eastern Wood Pewees, repeating their name, were heard by the Tafel Team and the Sturge trio; Alder, Least, Great Crested and Eastern Kingbirds, all with terribly simple, but different songs were observed by several. Three new- for-the-year species of vireos made appearances – Warbling; the ubiquitous Red-eyed; and the Philadelphia, the latter heard by the Tafel Team. They also saw and heard the energetic House Wren at Vic Rizzo's favourite location.

Three new thrushes for the year – Veery; Wood seen or heard by the two birdathon groups, the Sturge trio and Mary Young; and Swainson's noted only by the Tafel Team.

Gray Catbirds were heard or seen by many, including Mary. But a Northern Mockingbird? This very rare-for-here bird with its melodious song was heard by the Buchanan quintet within Laurier Woods. Cedar Waxwings had just arrived and were observed, often upon berry trees, by Mary, the Sturge trio and the two birdathon groups.

Now for the wonderful wood warblers! Eighteen species were seen or heard, fourteen for the first time. Just naming the new ones observed by a few should conjure up their special presence: Tennessee, Nashville, Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Pine, Bay-breasted, Black and White, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Mourning, Common Yellowthroat and Canada. The latter beauty was discovered only by Mary. Then there was the exotic, male Scarlet Tanager enjoyed much by the Tafel Team on Jocko Point Road, and by Kaye Edmunds.

Striking Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were fairly common, noticed by Donna Demarco in the east end, and by the three stated groupings. Singing Bobolinks were seen in the farming areas, but the beautiful Baltimore Oriole was discovered only by the two birdathon groups near the Veuve River.

Now as to birds seen at a previous Bird Bash this year: certainly the iconic Common Loon is being commonly heard and/or seen now, as are large numbers of the Double-crested Cormorants and a few Great Blue Herons.

American Bitterns were noted by Steve and Kaye, but a special pair of them was seen by the Tafel quartet. They looked like two wavering, thin, slowly moving sticks trying to hide within tall grasses. Green Herons were also observed by that group. Soaring

Turkey Vultures are now seen frequently, and still there are lots of Canada Geese about, many now with goslings.

Sixteen duck species, including the two main mergansers, were still around, but in smaller numbers. Most of these were observed in one or more of the lagoons within the vicinity. One, the very neat Northern Pintail, always rather rare hereabouts, was found by the Buchanan Team at Warren Lagoon.

Osprey are now seeable at any of the several nests dotted about the vicinity. Northern Harriers were spotted by both the Buchanan and Sturge groups, as was the Red-tailed Hawk. The Bald Eagle was noted only by Steve in the Talon Lake area. American Kestrel were observed by both birdathon groups, while the Merlin was seen with just-caught food – a Black-capped Chickadee - only by the Tafel Team. Ruffed Grouse were fairly widely seen or heard.

American Coot were noted by any who visited Warren Lagoon, while Sandhill Crane were observed only by Kaye and the Buchanan and Sturge groups.

One Lesser Yellowlegs at Callander Lagoon was concluded after a photo disclosure by Sarah. Spotted Sandpipers were found in a few places by both birdathon groups and by Kaye. Wilson's Snipe was observed solely by the Sturges. The night-singing or *peenting* American Woodcock was heard or seen by the two birdathon groups and by Mary.

The two main gulls were spotted by many, but the daring Caspian and Common Terns were identified only by the birdathon competitors. Doves of both species were fairly commonplace. The Belted Kingfisher was noted by several. All five common woodpeckers were widely observed. Eastern Phoebe, the only flycatcher previously noted in our Bird Bashes, was seen by many. The Blue-headed Vireo, the only vireo seen in April, was observed again this month by the Tafel quintet and the Sturge trio.

Of course, Blue Jays, American Crows and Common Ravens were commonly seen, as were the four of our five swallows. Cliff Swallows were unseen this month.

What can we say about the chickadees and nuthatches but that they remain friendly and common here.

Lengthy-singing Winter Wrens were noted by the Tafel and Sturge groups. The latter found the only Golden-crowned Kinglets. Tiny Ruby-crowns were on Kaye's list and that of the Tafel Team. The latter bunch enjoyed lovely Eastern Bluebirds, as did the Sturges. Several, including Doug, found Hermit Thrushes, American Robins and Brown Thrashers.

Four of the previously observed warblers were re-discovered – the most beautiful Northern Parula, Yellow, Chestnut-sided and Yellow-rumped. As for sparrows, six species were noted again – Chipping, Savannah, Song, Swamp, White-throated and White-crowned, the latter only by Donna. Red-winged Blackbirds were seen again by most participants, but the Eastern Meadowlarks, only by the Tafel and Sturge groups. Common Grackles remain commonplace, but sneaky Brown-headed Cowbirds were observed only by Steve and the Sturges.

Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, American Goldfinches and Evening Grosbeaks remained at many feeders, but House Sparrows were only noted by the two birdathon groups and the Sturges.

A bit disappointing that no one observed the lovely Indigo Bunting, the Brown Creeper, the Gray Jay, Bonaparte's Gulls, Black Terns, either rail or any of the grebes.

But, all in all, a very enjoyable and productive weekend. Congrats all!

**June's Bird Bash weekend** will not be quite as exciting, but surely almost as productive. So plan for it –**June 24-25**.