

Bird Wing Report, June 2017

By Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe; photos as indicated

Bird Wing Outing: Our mission on June 27, which we chose to accept, was to find three target species on River Road: Le Conte's Sparrow (seen at right), Sedge Wren and Yellow Rail. Unlike *Mission Impossible* in which the mission was subject to official denial in the event of failure, we are not disavowing our failure to see or hear our target species. We don't like to make excuses for our failure, but it may be that the target species were aware of two dogs, Gus and Abi, who against instruction escaped at one point from their vehicle. At any rate, despite efforts spanning 1.5 hours, the target species did not make their presence known. (Three of the agents are seen below.)



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But other species were much more cooperative, with the highlight of the evening being an American Bittern even though two in the group did not hear it because they were more intent on listening for the target species. Another highlight was watching a Northern Harrier hunt.

Despite our failure with the target species, we had a fun and convivial evening and saw many other species, listed here in no particular order: 2 American Crows; at least 8 Red-winged Blackbirds; 3 American Goldfinch; 2 Mallards, a male and a female, in a puddle of water in a wet field; 10 Savannah Sparrows; 2 or 4 Eastern

Kingbirds; 2 Song Sparrows;
9 Common Grackles; 2
Cedar Waxwings; a Barn
Swallow; 4 Common
Yellowthroats; 3 Swamp
Sparrows; 3 Yellow
Warblers; and about a dozen
Bobolinks, all male but two.
(Two females are seen at
right.)

On our way to River Road,
on Hills Siding Road, some
of us saw or heard a
Swainson's Thrush; a Song
Sparrow; 3 Common
Yellowthroats; a Northern
Flicker; 3 American Robins;
and a European Starling.

And on their way home and just outside Powassan, Gary, Connie, Abi and Gus
Sturge saw a Wilson's Snipe atop a post, as shown below. (Well, not too sure
about Abi and Gus.)



Matt Walter



Gary Sturge

Last year we saw a Moose, and although we were not privileged to see one this year, we saw a deer in a field off River Road and three Snowshoe Hares on Hills Siding Road. Heard were at least three Tree Frogs and a lone Spring Peeper.

As always, the sunset, although not as brilliant as in previous years, was still a treat.

Rare Birds:

Continuing the trend with spotting rare or unusual birds in our area, Fred Pinto was especially fortunate to see a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (right) on Homestead Road on June 7. It was apparently there for a few days prior to Fred's sighting, but not seen after June 7. Did Fred frighten



Fred Pinto

it off? Well, if he did, at least he got a photo before it flew. (Brent and Laura Turcotte were the last known birders to have seen one in our area. They, along with David Radcliff, saw one at Sunset Park on May 18, 2015.)

This makes up for our not being graced with a Dickcissel which seems to have made appearances in many parts of Southern Ontario – and recently in Algoma – this summer.

Perhaps we will still get a Dickcissel here, so be on the look-out and contact me immediately should you spot one.

Blue Birds of Summer: Blue birds of summer are the beautiful Indigo Bunting (below, top photo) with his joyful song which he sings well into late summer and the lovely Eastern Bluebird, the male with his bright blue back, wings and tail, and the female with her paler blue.



Angela Martin



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And then there is the Blue Jay with its vivid blue coat which perhaps we don't appreciate as much as we should because we see it so often. And after an active

winter and spring during which time it makes its presence boisterously known, it becomes secretive around the nest in late June and into July and we rarely hear or see it until it emerges with its young.

National Bird: Speaking of jays, the Gray/Grey Jay in particular, the government in its wisdom has decided not to give us a national bird after all. In an email to CBC, a heritage department spokesperson confirmed this: "At this time, the government of Canada is not actively considering proposals to adopt a bird as a national symbol." Nipissing birder Steve Pitt succinctly put it this way, "I guess, in the government's own way, they just gave us the bird."

Birding Adventures: Two recent birding adventures by three area birders, Steve Pitt and Grant and Shirley McKercher, are worth noting.

Steve: "I almost got a fish on my windshield while driving down Hwy 11 when an Osprey with a large fish in its claws lurched onto the Lakeshore ramp heading for its nest just off the ramp. I think the fish was heavier than anticipated by the way the Osprey flew out in front on my car. No harm was done, but if I had been driving a convertible version of my car, I could have plucked a tail feather for my Robin Hood cap. Not that I would have plucked tail feathers off any hard-working bird with mouths to feed, but I was glad I had at least enough time to brake."



Grant: “While in our car on Main Street in downtown Callander during the June Bird Bash, a young Chipping Sparrow flew through the open window into the car, sat on my wife's shoulder, then on the dashboard, before exiting through the open window.” Grant’s and Shirley’s experience brings to mind what Henry David Thoreau said: “I once had a sparrow alight upon my shoulder for a moment while I was hoeing in a village garden, and I felt that I was more distinguished by that circumstance than I should have been by any epaulet I could have worn.”

Piping Plovers: I recently had the privilege of seeing three adult Piping Plovers in Wasaga Beach at the cordoned area in Beach 1 beside the very, very crowded Main Beach. Thanks to the help of one of the volunteers, Marilyn, who had her scope with her, I had good views of all three through the scope. The plovers were too far away to be captured well on camera, but in the photo below if you look closely and zoom in, you will see two of them. There is also apparently a young chick, but I did not see it. Marilyn told me that only three pairs arrived this spring. One pair relocated from one nest to another, after predation by crows at the first nest site, but unfortunately at the relocated nest site the chicks got preyed upon, at least one by a Merlin; the female of the second pair disappeared and the male abandoned the nest; and the third pair had four chicks, but only one survived. It is thought that most of the chicks and the female of the second pair were victims of predation, primarily by Merlins, natural predators of Piping Plovers.



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The Piping Plover, seen better in the Wikipedia photo at right, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piping_plover, is an endangered species, meaning extinction or extirpation is fairly imminent.



From Wikipedia

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Wasaga Beach Provincial Park and the Friends of Nancy Island Piping Plover Recovery Program, a program which began in 2008 when the Piping Plover returned to Wasaga Beach. Last year saw the successful fledging of 14 chicks, but this year has not been so good.

There are very few other areas in Ontario where Piping Plovers can be found, one being Sauble Beach. Piping Plover nesting areas are cordoned off to help prevent human disturbance – bathers, beach recreational activities and grooming of beaches.

AOS Checklist of North and Middle America Birds: The AOS, America Ornithology Society, has come out with its bird list and the two that are most applicable to us in Nipissing and Parry Sound Districts are: Common and Hoary Redpolls are still to be considered as two separate species; and thankfully to some of us, the Thayer's Gull is to be considered a subspecies of the Iceland Gull. See: <http://checklist.aou.org/taxa/>.

Chimney Swifts: Doug Patterson alerted me to a chimney in Mattawa that has been Chimney Swift active for some years now and the good news is that the owner of the home loves having the swifts. Although Doug witnessed about 35 to 40 Chimney Swifts entering the chimney the week of June 19, by the time Doug informed me, the swifts had moved on. Nevertheless, April McCrum and I drove

to Mattawa in the pouring rain the evening of June 26, the only evening we were available, and met up with Doug and his father. As suspected, the swifts had moved on, but we now know where the chimney is and know that the owner is pleased to be host. There may be other homes in historic Mattawa that have appropriate chimneys. To view Doug's video, see <https://www.facebook.com/nipissingnaturalistsclub/videos/1987751398148745/>.

Grant McKercher's report on the numbers in North Bay and April's assessment of possible suitable chimneys in North Bay will be found in September's *The Woodland Observer* and copied for September's Bird Wing report.

Eastern Whip-poor-wills: On a clear almost-full-moon night in early June, Dick Tafel, April and I made our way to Dreany Lake, after Dick secured permission from the owner, to do a survey of the number of



From Birds of North America

Eastern Whip-poor-wills there, the only location known to have Eastern Whip-poor-wills in the immediate North Bay area. (photo from The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, *Birds of North America*, above, <https://birdsna.org/Species-Account/bna/species/whipp1/introduction>.) Results indicated there were at least two Eastern Whip-poor-wills at Dreany Lake. One was heard in the park itself, the other, from the highway on the other side of Dreany Lake.

Fledglings: It is always a delight to see nestlings fledged and fledglings learning to manage on their own. It's a long journey for the birds to get to that stage and it

is not always successful. Last year it took three nest-buildings before the pair of American Robins that nested in our yard successfully fledged three chicks. This year, a pair of Chipping Sparrows successfully fledged one, but the same pair met with disaster on Canada Day when their second nest got dislodged from the tree in our front yard as a result of the heavy and steady downpour we had that day. (Photo at right.) Three little blue eggs were shattered. One remained intact and although we put the nest with the one remaining egg back in the tree, we later discovered it too got dislodged and the remaining egg broke. All that work!



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On another more successful note, a friend sent me a photo of a Mourning Dove that nested in a bird house on top of her fence and in the house were two little doves. (Photo on next page.)

Nocturnal Owl Survey Report: The Nocturnal Owl Survey Report is posted on the Nipissing Naturalists Club website for those who did not yet get a chance to read the very entertaining narratives from all participants:

<https://www.nipnats.com/club-activities/bird-wing/>.

Bird Bash: The July Bird Bash takes place the last weekend of July - **July 29 and 30.**

Bird Wing Outing: The July Bird Wing outing takes place **Tuesday, July 25**, considered by some to be Christmas in July. So celebrate the day by attending the outing, whereabouts unknown at this stage. **Meet at the former Visitors' Centre at 6:30 p.m. for carpooling.** Details will be sent to birders prior to the outing.



Allison Roy