

Bird Wing Report

March 27, 2018

By Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe; photos as indicated

Seems there is always a lot to talk about at our Bird Wing meetings and March's meeting held in the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library was no exception.

Birds Seen in March: Because our meeting so closely followed March's Bird Bash and Dick Tafel's Bird Bash Report, I will confine our sightings mainly to raptors and a vulture, as well as to migrating birds.

Raptors:

Northern Harrier and Snowy Owl: Probably the most exciting sighting was made by Lori Anderson just as she was leaving to come to the meeting. As she was pulling out of her driveway what was on one side but a Snowy Owl and on the other side, a Northern Harrier. The latter was also seen two days prior by Ken Gowing, also in Chisholm Township.

Merlin (seen at right): Seen by Dick and me on Cook Mills Road during the Bird Bash. At first glance, because we were not able to get a good look at it, we thought it was a Sharp-shinned Hawk, only its tail did not seem long enough. But a better view and binoculars determined it was a Merlin.

Red-tailed Hawk: One was seen by Gary Sturge on Maple Hill Road, and one by Dick and me at the Powassan Landfill Site.

Rough-legged Hawk: One was seen by Gary at Peever Line and Maple Hill Road and one was seen by Lori in Chisholm Township.



Karl Dittman



Renee Levesque

Peregrine Falcon: Seen on top of the cross at the Pro-Cathedral (left) by Gary Chowns, Dick Tafel and me.

Bald Eagle: Matt Proconier saw one on Maple Hill Road and Dick and I saw a couple at the Powassan Landfill Site.

Turkey Vulture: Ken and Lori saw a Turkey Vulture in Restoule, first sighting this year!

Great-Horned Owl: By encroaching on Gary's territory, the famed Stillaway Line, Lori and Ken heard a Great-Horned Owl.

Migrating Birds:

Canada Geese: Grant McKercher saw a few Canada Geese on Callander Bay; Marc Buchanan saw anywhere from 30 to 40 in Lee Park; Lori and Ken saw some in Restoule; and others saw a few on the South River and in Bonfield.

Herring Gulls: Seen by Grant on Osprey Links and by Dick and me at the Powassan Landfill Site and on the Ottawa and South Rivers.

American Robin: Nine were seen by Ken Gowing at Pioneer and Bellcairn the morning of our meeting. First sighting of the year! I thought that might mean spring would arrive any day, but 39 cm of snow arrived instead!

Red-winged Blackbird: Luanne Chowns saw one; Lori saw one; Paul Smylie saw one by the university; Steve Pitt had one at his place on Lake Talon; and Gary Sturge saw three at his place west of Powassan.

Common Grackle (seen at right): Luanne saw 5 or 6 in town and Steve had one at his place. Gary Sturge's over-wintering grackle continues at his feeder.



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Other Birds of Note:

Trumpeter Swan: Ken and Lori saw 2 at Restoule.

Red Crossbill: Dick and I saw 4 males on Hwy. 533 between Hwy 63 and Mattawa, ending months of searching for them; and Grant saw some in the Lake Bernard area.

White-winged Crossbill: Seen by Connie Sturge on the famed Stillaway.

Snow Bunting: Lori continues to see Snow Buntings on occasion at her place in Chisholm Township, although not in the numbers she had been seeing them – more like 50 than 200. Dick and I saw 2 on Summit Drive during the Bird Bash.

Gray Jay: Jim Hasler continues to get Gray Jays at his feeders and others have been seen on Cooks Mill Road and Highway 64 outside Lavigne.

Common Redpoll: One was seen by Dick at his feeder. There was not the influx that was expected this past winter, but there was certainly an influx of Pine Siskins and American Goldfinch, the latter at Oriana Pokorny's feeder. Numbers of both have started to decrease.

(Curtis Irish's mention of Rock Pigeons led me to inform members that North Bay's Racing Pigeon Club is no longer operating and so some interest in our seeing either the end or the beginning of a race is not to be.)

World Sparrow Week: World Sparrow Day falls on March 20 each year, but because it is still winter in our area and, therefore, there is more often than not a dearth of sparrows, we expanded the Day to a Week, this year from March 18 to March 22. And although internationally the day is set aside to appreciate the House Sparrow in particular, we expanded that to include all sparrows, those birds that people not-in-know call Little Brown Jobbies. Except at Lori's and in Gary and Connie's area, as well as at the Verner Co-op Feed Store, we don't tend to have many House Sparrows. No one is particularly upset at this because this sparrow is after all an introduced species and one not much appreciated in cities. And although one should not base one's like or dislike on a bird's



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looks, most of us, with the exception of Dick, have to admit the House Sparrow does not have its looks going for it as you will see in the photo I took of some under the cab of a truck at the Verner Co-op Feed Store.

This year, 15 birders reported a total of 93 sparrows comprised of 6 species! Not bad for a wintry week in

March. Seen were 31 House Sparrows; 49 American Tree Sparrows; 10 Dark-eyed Juncos; 1 Chipping Sparrow; 1 White-throated Sparrow; and 1 Harris's Sparrow. This year could prove to have a record number of species and we may never have a Harris's again. Last year, we saw only 11 sparrows and 3 species, House, American Tree and a Song Sparrow.

Great Backyard Bird Count: We birders do like to count our birds and the Great Backyard Bird Count held each winter over the Family Day weekend is a great opportunity for just that. Participants in 155 countries around the world submitted 176,905 checklists recording 6,310 species! United States submitted the greatest number of checklists, 108,921, followed by Canada with 14,008. Colombia observed the greatest number of species, 996, followed by Ecuador with 904, Brazil with 847, India with 832 and Mexico with 780. Canada recoded 251 species.

The species observed in the greatest numbers were the Snow Goose – almost 5 million reported. This was followed by the Canada Goose, Common Murre, Red-winged Blackbird, Ring-billed Gull, Mallard, European Starling, American Coot, Common Grackle and Herring Gull.

Nocturnal Owl Survey: Routes and teams have been set and the coveted trophy is ready to be taken away from Gary and Connie Sturge, last year's deserving recipients. In fact, our little contest achieved some notoriety when Kathy Jones, Volunteer Coordinator at Bird Studies Canada, made mention of the Sturges, our group and our contest in February's Ontario Nocturnal Owl Survey Newsletter. I previously sent the link to all birders and Sarah Wheelan posted the link on Nipissing Naturalists Club's Facebook. For those who didn't get a chance to read Gary's story, [click here](#). It was not Gary's winning story, by the way, but the story based on the route he did with Connie and Rachel.



The above photo is of Dick's 5th attempt at getting a decent photo of the Barred Owl that visited his feeders for mice. His Rembrandt keeps improving!

Please select someone from your team to write this year's story and submit it to me as soon as possible after you complete your route. The winner will be determined by the number of owls seen and heard and the quality of the story.

Year of the Bird: 2018 has been declared the Year of the Bird by the National Audubon Society, Birdlife International, National Geographic and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. To mark 100 years of federal legislation supporting migratory birds, each of these core organizations and many others are focusing on bird conservation issues. Dick showed us March's issue of National Geographic. In its celebration of the Year of the Bird, National Geographic is featuring an article on birds in each issue. The March issue is about Migration, entitled Epic Migration, and comes with a detailed poster showing migration routes. As with all National Geographic articles, the photos are magnificent. If you don't have a subscription, it can be difficult to find this magazine in the stores, but if you do happen to come across one, do buy it. (Perhaps Allison's used book store has some for sale.)

Nipissing Naturalists Club in partnership with North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority and Bird Studies Canada will be installing a Motus Wildlife Tracking System in this The Year of the Bird. In addition to this group project, however, you might want to think about an individual project or a small group project. It could be as small as going on some birding outings this spring and summer or learning about four new wood warblers, or as big as going to Australia to bird there. I have a special bluebird nestbox that Lori will put up at her place, along with her many bluebird nestboxes, and we will loosely monitor them.

If you are planning on doing something special for The Year of the Bird, please let me know what your plans or projects are and how they turned out. Depending on the response, maybe I can put something together in a sort of newsletter form.

Motus Wildlife Tracking System: Gary Sturge reports that the installation of the Motus Wildlife Tracking System is scheduled for the end of April and should be fully operational by May 2. There will be a ribbon-cutting ceremony on May 25 to which birders, the general public and dignitaries are invited.

Motus allows researchers to track the movements of birds with the use of miniaturized radio transmitters. These transmitters or tags emit a short burst or pulse every few seconds. The pulses are picked up by high frequency receivers which can detect and record signals from the tags at distances up to 15 to 20 km. When tagged birds pass within range of any receiver, data gets recorded automatically into Bird Studies Canada's central database in Southern Ontario where it is shared with researchers. Each tag has a unique signature and from it a massive amount of detail can be gleaned, such as where the bird has travelled, how quickly it has travelled, and how long it has stopped on route. The Motus network of antennas has been positioned throughout North America and is expanding into Central and South America. (Motus now also has a foothold in Europe.)

Birds tagged are those that are being studied by researchers. The information is invaluable in helping them determine threats to vulnerable species on their breeding and wintering grounds and along their migration routes.

Rail

Adventure: When Marc Buchanan and Grant McKercher met up in Florida this past February to do some birding on Sanibel Island, they saw and photographed a rail, a rail they assumed at first glance was a King or a Virginia Rail. But their photographs showed it was neither. So what kind of rail was it? When I saw the photographs, I thought maybe it was a Caribbean or South American rail and came across in my field guide a rail



Marc Buchanan

called a Slaty-breasted Rail looking very similar to Grant's and Marc's. In the meantime, Grant sent a photo to Mike Burrell who thought it was either a Giant Wood Rail or a Gray-cowled Rail. In one of the photos Marc took, the rail had a plastic band on its leg. This led Mike to declare that it was not a wild bird, but an escapee from a zoo or elsewhere because a band on a wild bird would be aluminum. Marc entered the sighting on eBird and eventually heard back that the rail in question was a Giant Wood Rail, an escapee from nearby Periwinkle Park, a campsite with a sort of bird zoo.

An interesting note to ponder: Grant, a winter escapee, saw an escapee while he was in Florida and had just been back home when he saw another escapee, Chucky the Chukar, at Young's store on Wasi Road.

Great Canadian Birdathon: The Great Canadian Birdathon will take place over the **weekend of May 26 and 27**. We will begin at 1:00 p.m. on Saturday the 26th and finish up 24 hours later, at 1:00 p.m. on Sunday the 27th. Whoever takes part should make a donation to the Great Canadian Birdathon.

Bird Bash: April's Bird Bash will take place over the **weekend of April 28 and 29**. Spring, real spring that is, may be here by then, but with all the snow we recently got, I am not so sure.

Bird Wing Meeting: April's Bird Wing Meeting will be held at the North Bay Public Library on **Tuesday, April 24, starting at 6:30 p.m.** This will be the last indoor meeting until September. For May through to August, Bird Wing outings will be held in the field.