

Bird Wing Meeting
North Bay Public Library Auditorium
March 23, 2016

Text and Photos: Renee Levesque unless otherwise indicated

It was yet another lively and energetic meeting of Bird Wing. A couple of topics sparked some debate – birding by car and citizen science survey results. Perhaps because birders walk silently through woods and fields and along roads, that is when they are NOT driving, looking and listening for birds, we let go when we get together!

Birds seen during the month of March: Spring birds have started to arrive, always a cause for excitement among birders. Even what eventually become common birds, ones we see over and over again all summer, excite us when first seen. Since the writing of this report, more and more spring birds have arrived. Refer to Dick Tafel's Bird Bash report for March for other birds seen during March. Thirty-three participants saw 64 species of birds, the second largest number since Bird Bashes began in 2004. Only in 2012 were more species (67) reported in March, and you may recall that was a very warm March with temperatures well into the 20s.

Gary Sturge was the first to see a Turkey Vulture (below) on Hwy. 534 and a Northern Harrier on Maple Hill Road. Since then a couple of others have seen Northern Harriers in West Nipissing.



Connie Hergott saw an American Robin in Commanda and Renee Levesque saw six of them in a field on Maple Hill Road. By now, most of us have seen a robin, our most endearing sign of spring.

Renee also saw an American Kestrel on Hwy. 17 by the road to Cache Bay and Ken Gowing saw one on River Road in Chisholm Township. Since then others have seen American Kestrels, primarily in West Nipissing.

Renee also saw a Song Sparrow (seen below in her yard March). It was a surprising sighting, arriving earlier in her yard than is usual, the day before the Bird Wing meeting. It continues to make a daily appearance.



Although some American Tree Sparrows overwintered, the migrants have now arrived, seen by Gary and by Lori Anderson.

Ken had Red-wing Blackbirds (right) and at least six American Woodcocks near his place in Chisholm Township. Red-wings have now made their presence known in various pockets of our region, and Brent and Laura Turcotte heard an American Woodcock in the Cedar Heights area.



Lori had Common and Hooded Mergansers on her property in Chisholm Township and since then others have seen both, in the Sturgeon River and at the West Arm Narrows.

Canada Geese are arriving in large numbers. Marc Buchanan saw them on Lake Nipissing. Others have seen them in wet fields in the area and Dick Tafel and Renee saw approximately 400 at the mouth of the Sturgeon River (below) during March's Bird Bash.



Curtis Irish and others have seen Ring-billed and Herring Gulls in town and on Lake Nipissing. Both gulls seemed to have arrived around the same time, although usually the Herring Gulls arrive before the Ring-bills.

So spring is definitely well underway, although many of our winter birds remain. These include: Common Redpolls, still seen by many in large flocks; Pine Siskins (right) seen by many and often seen with flocks of Common Redpolls; Evening Grosbeaks still at Lori's; Snow Buntings seen by Craig Hurst at his place near Redbridge, and also seen by Renee near the village of Nipissing and in West Nipissing during March's Bird Bash; and the Northern Shrike seen by Connie Sturge on Maple Hill Road and by Renee on Hwy. 64, also during the recent Bird Bash. Connie also saw on Hwy. 534 what may have been the last Snowy Owl sighting in our region this winter.



Kaye Edmond's male Northern Cardinal is still visiting her feeders and we hope it continues to remain in the area over the summer. In the past, it seems none are reported after spring until late fall/early winter.

Matt and Ray Walter's two pair of Dark-eyed Juncos continue to feed at their feeders.

Both White (left) and Red-breasted Nuthatches continue to be seen as they have all winter, the White-breasted much less than the Red-breasted which has been very abundant this winter.

Craig had a Mourning Dove in his yard, the first in many years; Dick, a Ruffed Grouse

and a Pileated Woodpecker; and Matt, a Downy Woodpecker.

Two Trumpeter Swans were seen by Renee at Restoule and three by Dick, at West Arm Narrows.

Fred Pinto, who joined the group after we all had provided the two birds we saw, had to come up with two no one had yet mentioned and two he had seen despite being out of the country for a month. He surprised us by being able to do so – the ever-faithful and energetic Black-capped Chickadee and the very intelligent American Crow!

Speaking of Fred, there is another common bird we see all winter, although without its yellow bill, the European Starling, an invasive species thanks to a fan of Shakespeare's who released 60 in Central Park in 1890, in hopes of populating the New World with birds mentioned in Shakespeare's plays. The starling reference is in Act 1, Scene 3 of *Henry IV*. "Nay, I'll have a starling shall be taught to speak; Nothing but 'Mortimer,' and give it him." Meaning: A soldier is ordered by the king never to again mention his brother-in-law's name, Mortimer, and so the soldier dreamed of buying a starling, known as a great mimic, that would repeat the name Mortimer over and over again. (The reference to Fred is an in-joke, synonymous with Fred much as the Black-backed Woodpecker is synonymous with Gary.)

Kaye had an adult female Cooper's Hawk (right) swoop down into her yard and proceed to eat a Rock Pigeon and Connie H. saw a barred Owl on Cedar Heights Road. (Thanks to Nicole Richardson for helping identify the Cooper's Hawk.)



Photo by Kaye Edmonds

National Nocturnal Owl Survey: From **April 1 to the end of April**, the annual nocturnal owl survey takes place. This survey provides an opportunity for birders to get startled by an unexpected *who cooks for you, who cooks for you all* on a dark and lonely road in the middle of nowhere.

The Ontario Nocturnal Owl Survey was initiated in 1995 by Bird Studies Canada, in partnership with the Wildlife Assessment Program of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, to gather information on the distribution, abundance and population of owls.

Bird Studies Canada reports that last April was their best owl survey season in more than a decade. There were 199 voluntary surveyors who covered 184 routes. In total, 781 owls of nine species were recorded.

Barred Owls (right) were the most frequently detected and in the far Northern Routes, the Boreal Owl numbers more than doubled from 2014. Numbers for non-owl target species were also up considerably: 73 Wilson's Snipe (only 10 in



2014); 51 Ruffed Grouse (only six in 2014); and 229 American Woodcock (147 in 2014).

The weather in 2015 was considerably better than in 2014, which probably accounts for the higher numbers all round. Let's hope it is good for 2016.

Participants in the survey conduct standardized roadside surveys of owls in forested areas in central and northern Ontario. A team of at least two volunteers drives a pre-determined route, stopping at fixed intervals along the route to play a tape consisting of pre-recorded owl calls, followed by a listening period. Owls seen or heard during each listening period are identified and recorded. **Surveys begin a half-hour after sunset during a single evening in April and take about 3 hours to complete, not including travelling time to and from the survey route.**

Owls are very secretive, primarily nocturnal and very territorial, especially during breeding season. When songs are played within an owl's territory, the resident owl will respond vocally in an attempt to defend its territory against an intruder.

Anyone can participate in the survey. A training tape is provided to participants so they can become familiar with the different owl calls. However, there are designated routes and you need to check to see if these routes are available. If there are no routes available, you will be put on a waiting list for an available one.

You can also set up your own route, but there are definite instructions for doing so. Roads used in surveys should be permanent so they can be surveyed in future years and should be at least 30.4 km. long for the northern surveys and 18 km. long for the central surveys.

For more information on the Nocturnal Owl Survey visit:
<http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/onowls/>

This link will provide you with the name of the Ontario Volunteer Coordinator, Kathy Jones, and her contact information, as well as a link to instructions, the available routes and the most recent *Ontario Nocturnal Owl Survey Newsletter*. There are currently at least five routes available in our area: Sand Dam Road; Brain Lake; Commanda; Restoule Provincial Park; and Rutherglen-Bonfield. Click on the link to available routes to find out exactly where these routes are.

Winter Finch Assessment:

Kevin Hannah who conducted a winter finch assessment in our area at the homes of Lori Anderson, Mary Young and Ernie Frayle and who spoke to us about his assessment at February's Bird Wing meeting, sent us a thank you email, thanking Dick for setting up the locations and thanking us, especially those at whose homes he spent a good part of the day, for our hospitality. The article on Kevin's presentation at our last meeting was sent to Bird Wingers as a separate article. If you did not receive it, you can read it online on the Nipissing Naturalists Club website.



American Woodcock Singing Ground Survey: Between **April 20 and May 20**, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in partnership with Bird Studies Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, conducts a survey of American Woodcocks seen or heard. This survey requires volunteers participate in a roadside survey by following a standard protocol that involves stopping at pre-assigned route points within a very tight time window. Data obtained must be entered online immediately through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service data entry website.

To listen to a Woodcock's *peent* call before taking off on its brief aerial mating flight, click <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1g4ZX6crwM>

It would appear there are only a couple of routes open in our area, one at Tilden Lake in which a volunteer is needed to assist in re-establishing a safer route in the same general area, from May 1 to May 20; and one in River Valley, for the same time period.

For more information, review the [Ontario Routes for the AWSGS](#), and contact Kathy Jones, Ontario Volunteer Coordinator, at 1-888-448-2473 ext. 124, or email her at volunteer@birdscanada.org.

Great Backyard Bird Count: The results are not yet available, except in a general sense, but the Great Backyard Bird Count, held over the Family Day weekend in February when we in Nipissing experienced an extreme cold snap, was a resounding success. An amazing 5,589 species were reported worldwide, topping 50% of the world's species for the first time. Over 150,000 checklists were submitted and 149 countries participated. Canadians saw 245 species in total and submitted 13,447 checklists. In Nipissing, 33 species were seen and 70 checklists submitted.

Nipissing Naturalists Club Website: For those who do not yet know, Sarah Wheelan, Board member, Nipissing Naturalists Club, has revamped the club's website and has done a terrific job. Bird Wing now has a prominent place on the website. Posted are current and past Bird Wing meeting reports; results of the Christmas Bird Counts; Year-end Bird Reports; and Bird Bash reports. (Further Year-end Reports will be forthcoming.) And if that isn't enough, to further enhance the Bird Wing section, Sarah has included photos of birds seen in our area, photos that have appeared in the Bird Wing reports. These photos will change or will be added to every now and then. So be sure to check out our new website and Bird Wing in particular at: <http://www.nipnats.com/club-activities/bird-wing/>

Great Canadian Birdathon: The Great Canadian Birdathon is held yearly during May. The goal is to raise money to support bird research and conservation.

Anyone can participate. You count the number of species seen for as many hours as you can over a 24-hour period. It doesn't matter if you can't bird from 6 AM to 10 PM as some hardy birders do. The idea is to get donations, big or small, then get out, look for birds and find as many species as possible during your hours out. Pictured above are Matt, Dick and Lori at the 2015 Birdathon.



If you plan to obtain donations, you must first register at: <http://birdscanada.kintera.org/faf/home/default.asp?ievent=1153443>, and then click *Register Here* on the left-hand side of the page.

You can set up a donation page online or print a donor sheet and collect the money, making sure you get the names and addresses of all who donate. Money donated is to be sent to Bird Studies Canada (BSC) and BSC will issue tax receipts to all those who donate over \$10.00. BSC will also provide a percentage of the money you raise to a designated club or group dedicated to environmental conservation. If you raise between \$1.00 and \$5,000.00, your designated club or group will get 25% of the amount raised, and if you raise \$5,001.00 or more, your designated club or group will get 50%.

On the registration form, you must indicate the name, the mailing address and email address of the club to which you wish funds to be donated. You must also indicate the name of the club or group's president.

Last year, Dick Tafel and Fred Pinto raised enough money through donations by birders and non-birders in the Nipissing area to be able to contribute \$626.25 towards the \$5,000.00 needed by Nipissing Naturalists Club to help fund the historic plaque approved by Ontario Heritage Trust and to be installed at Pimisi Bay near Mattawa in honour of naturalist Louise de Kiriline Lawrence.

Plaque Honouring Louise de Kiriline Lawrence:

On August 18, at 1:30 p.m., Ontario Heritage Trust and the Nipissing Naturalists Club will honour Louise (right) at an event to be held at the Bonfield Parish Hall. **Details will be provided to everyone once they become known, but in the meantime, please mark August 18 in your calendars and be sure to attend.**

Louise, who lived in a log home at Pimisi Bay, won the prestigious John Burroughs medal, awarded yearly to an author of a distinguished book of natural history. She won it in 1969 for her delightful book, *The Lovely and the Wild*. She was the first Canadian to do so. Other winners you might be familiar with are Ernest Thompson Seton, Rachel Carson, and Roger Tory Peterson.

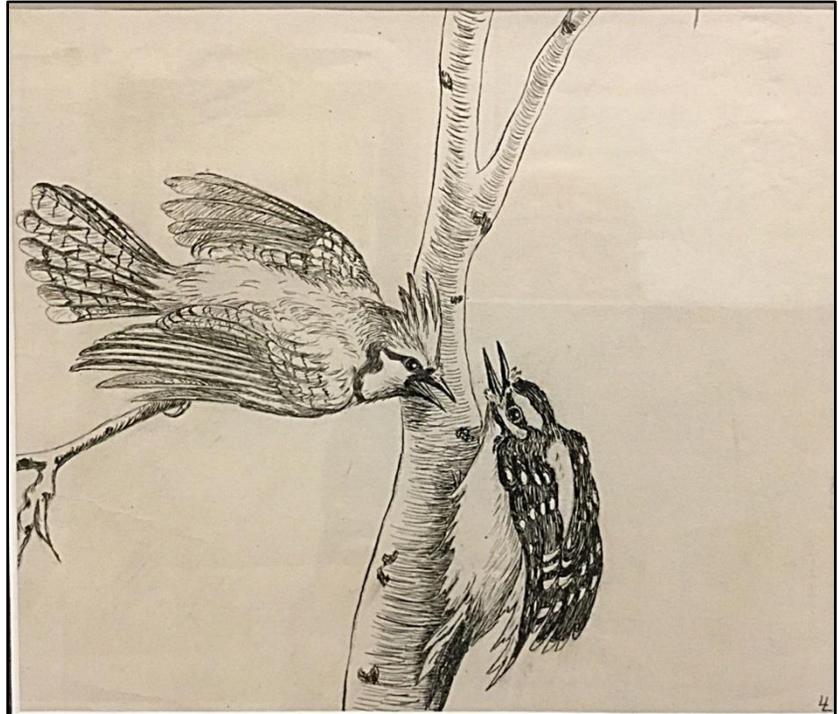
Louise wrote other books: *Mar, A Glimpse into the Natural Life of Bird*, the tale of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker; *To Whom the Wilderness Speaks*; *The Loghouse Nest*; and a poignant autobiography, *Another Winter, Another Spring: A Love Remembered*. As an internationally renowned naturalist, Louise contributed extensively to *Audubon*, the National Audubon Society magazine, and was a member of the American Ornithologists'



Union. She certainly deserves an Ontario Heritage Trust plaque and what better place to have it than near her very own Log Nest which she loved so dearly.

Online Auction: Contributions by groups and individuals, including \$100.00 contributed by Bird Wing, have been made towards the \$5,000.00 required to be provided by Nipissing Naturalists Club for the Louise de Kiriline Lawrence plaque. A list of contributors will be made available at a later date, but in the meantime, **starting March 29 and running until May 9**, is an online auction consisting of a drawing by Louise de Kiriline Lawrence (right); three of her books, all of which are signed by Louise; and prints from drawings of Paul Smylie. To bid, go online either through the Nipissing Naturalists Club website,

<http://www.nipnats.com/> and click on Online Auction highlighted in a green box, or go directly to the auction site, <https://www.32auctions.com/LKLplaque>.



Louise de Kiriline Lawrence Nature Festival: The event at the Bonfield Parish Hall on August 18 to honour Louise with an Ontario Heritage Trust plaque will be followed on **August 20** by the third annual Louise de Kiriline Lawrence Nature Festival at Laurier Woods. Details will be provided at a later date. During the Festival, there may be a tour of Louise's log house at Pimisi Bay, but that has not yet been confirmed.

Friends of Laurier Woods: Friends of Laurier Woods is holding its Annual General meeting at Rorab Shrine Club, 1260 Brooke Street, North Bay, on **Wednesday, April 6, from 6 to 9 p.m.** Guest speaker is Dick Tafel who will talk about the natural and cultural history of Laurier Woods. Tickets cost \$25.00 per person and must be purchased or reserved in advance. You can purchase your tickets at Mayne Travel, Main Street, downtown North Bay, or at the North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority, 15 Janey Avenue.

Starting the **first Saturday in May**, Dick will also be leading birding walks through Laurier Woods, **from 9 to 11 a.m. every Saturday morning** during the month of May. It is your chance to see the wood warblers. Best to see as many as you can before the trees are fully in leaf.

National Wildlife Week: National Wildlife Week, sponsored by the Canadian Wildlife Federation, takes place **April 10 to 16** and the theme this year is the winged creatures of the sky – and that means birds among all other things that fly.

On April 12, Canadian Wildlife Federation and F.L.A.P., Fatal Light Awareness Program, <http://www.flap.org/>, are asking office buildings and corporate towers turn off their lights for one evening to show support for the safety of migrating birds. **We can do our bit to help prevent window collisions by applying decals to our windows.** Laporte's on Lakeshore Drive may still sell them as they have other years. or you can order them online from Amazon.ca.

The Birds of the Desert: Dick, recently back from Palm Springs, California, regaled us about some of the birds of the desert he saw while there. His main purpose for going to Palm Springs was to see the tennis tournament at Indian Wells, played by top players in the world. (And in case you are curious and birding is not your only interest, Novak Djokovic won the tournament by defeating Milos Raonic, the Canadian, in the final, 6-2, 6-0.) But once a birder always a birder, and no matter where Dick and other birders go, birding is still a priority. Even at the tournament, Dick spotted a Say's Phoebe and Violet Green Swallows, and at the nearby Indian Wells golf course he saw a Belted Kingfisher and White-crowned Sparrows. There is something rather special about seeing birds elsewhere that are common here. It is like running into a friend or even just an acquaintance in a faraway place.

At Big Morongo Canyon, a short drive north of Palm Springs, Dick saw the Western Scrub Jay, Cooper's Hawk, Oak Titmouse, Bushtit, Verdin, Western Bluebird, Lesser and Lawrence's Goldfinches, California Thrasher, Black Phoebe, Phainopepla, Bewick's Wren, Anna's Hummingbird and the brilliant Vermillion Flycatcher.

Verdins were also seen by Dick around the condo he and his family were staying at in Palm Springs, as well as a Red-shouldered Hawk, the Audubon's form of the Yellow-rumped Warbler and a very active Greater Roadrunner. As when Marc saw a Roadrunner in Nevada back in the fall, this video is worth watching again, if only for memory's sake:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQGrwsar8H4>



Photo by Sonje Bols

In the 9,000 year old Oasis of Mara by the city of 29 Palms in San Bernardino County, Dick saw Red-tailed Hawks, Nuttall's Woodpecker and the Canyon Wren; and at Indian Canyons, he saw the White-throated Swift, Costa's Hummingbird, Canyon Towhee, as well as many American Robins, very unexpected in desert terrain, and no doubt having a stop-over on their way north.

In the Living Desert Gardens of Palm Springs, there were Black-crowned Night Herons, Western Wood Peewees and six high-flying migrating White Pelicans (right).

At the endangered Salton Sea, a lake 235 feet below sea level and an important stop-over on the Pacific Flyway, there can be found more than 400 species and subspecies of birds. Here Dick saw the beautiful Black-necked Stilts which weigh only five ounces and are very slim; Willets; Snowy Plovers (below); Eared Grebes; the White Egret; Sage Thrasher; a Green Heron; as well as four or five species of gulls and terns.



On the final full day of his trip, Dick and family took a breathtaking cable car ride up the sheer cliffs of Chino Canyon to Mount San Jacinto where Dick saw Mountain Chickadees.

Later that day, in Coachella Valley, Dick saw a Gambel's Quail, a fitting end to his trip because this bird is such a special bird for the area. (Gambel's Quail is named after William Gambel, a 19th century naturalist.)

Dick saw 82 species in total and six lifers. Not bad for a short vacation of two weeks during which he had to spend time with family and friends, not all who bird, and had to get out to at least some of the tennis matches!



Joshua Tree Birdfest. Desert photo by Sonje Bols, ornithologically “enhanced” by Paul Levesque. Birds, left to right, are: Greater Roadrunner, Phainopepla, Gambel’s Quail, California Thrasher and Verdin.

Bird Bash: April’s Bird bash takes place over a 24-hour period the weekend of **April 23 and 24.**

Bird Wing Meeting: The next Bird Wing meeting is on **Tuesday, April 26, from 6:30 to about 8:00 p.m. at the North Bay Public Library.** Following this shortened meeting, there will be an outing to Cedar Heights to listen for the American Woodcock and perhaps even see its courtship dance. This is the last indoor meeting of the season. From May to August, field outings will be held.

Keep a green tree in your heart and perhaps a singing bird will come.

-Chinese Proverb