

## ***BIRD WING OUTING***

*June 24, 2014*

### **Birding in the Rain**

The rain on the evening of the Bird Wing outing did not dampen the spirits of the hardy birders who attended. Better birding in the rain than in the wind!

First stop was the Callander Lagoon where we saw Wood Ducks, a mother with her six young and a father taking it easy on the other side of the lagoon; Hooded Mergansers; Ring-necked Ducks; Common Goldeneye; and a lone Double-crested Cormorant in flight. Across the way on the Osprey Links were at least 25 Canada Geese, including the goslings, as well as the ever-present Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles. The highlight, however, was seeing three Green Herons flying over the lagoon and one coming to rest in a tree across the road from the lagoon. (below)



As the rain continued, so did the intrepid birders. The next stop was the Powassan Lagoon with even more Wood Ducks, at least ten, mostly female and the young. Also seen were Tree Swallows (below) and Barn Swallows; Red-winged Blackbirds; and Song and Savannah Sparrows.



Then off to River Road in Chisholm Township in search of the Le Conte's Sparrow and the Yellow Rail. Despite a good hour trying to find both and despite the biting mosquitoes, neither was seen. BUT, we heard a Black-billed Cuckoo, a highlight for some. We saw a Swamp Sparrow; a Northern Harrier (below); and an American Kestrel; and heard the Song and Savannah Sparrows. The rain finally stopped and the sunset was wonderful, although not as spectacular as last year's July outing to River Road when we did see a Le Conte's, but not a Yellow Rail, which was heard once at the same location a few years back by Laura Chowns, Brent Turcotte, Dick Tafel, and other Bird Wing members. It created a lot of excitement because the Yellow Rail, a small secretive marsh bird, is much sought after by birdwatchers. Check it out on-line.



### **Owl Survey Results**

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. The primary goal is to monitor owl populations in Ontario to determine whether owls are affected by logging practices. The four main target species are the Great Gray Owl, the Barred Owl, the Boreal Owl and the Northern Saw-whet Owl. 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.

This past April four teams surveyed five routes, one team doing two routes.

On April 17, Lori Anderson and Ken Gowan surveyed their route in Chiswick Township beginning at the corner of Genesee and O'Connor Roads, following Genesee to Chiswick, then east to Boundary and then

east on Pioneer, finishing at Gravelle. They heard three Northern Saw-whet Owls and a Great Horned Owl. This was their first survey in which they did not hear any Barred Owls and only the second time they heard a Northern Saw-whet Owl. The night they surveyed the weather was pleasant, a quiet night, with no wind, no frogs and very little water noise.

Gary and Connie Sturges, along with Mark Olivier who accompanied them on their first route, surveyed two routes on Hwy. 533, north of Mattawa. The first route starts at Argo Run and goes north for the 18 km.; the second is adjacent to that one.

On the first route, they encountered eight Barred Owls (below) and four Northern Saw-whet Owls. Five of the Barred Owls flew out to them, one dive-bombing Mark, three feet overhead, and one dive-bombing Gary, five feet overhead. Connie was fortunately spared the dive-bombing. They also heard one American Woodcock and one Ruffed Grouse.



On the second route, they encountered three Barred Owls, none of which dive-bombed them this time, and six Northern Saw-whet Owls. They also heard four American Woodcocks.

The Doug Pattersons, senior and junior, conducted their very first survey on April 23 on Sturgeon Lake Road near Mattawa. It was a cool, clear night, with no wind, but only one Barred Owl was heard. Two Ruffed Grouse were seen and an American Woodcock was heard. Maybe next year, they too can experience the thrill of a dive-bomb!

Dick Tafel, Cal Osborne and Renee Levesque headed out in late April to conduct their survey along the very very bumpy McConnell Lake Road. It was a clear night with no wind and a beautiful bright moon overhead. Hearing or seeing owls didn't seem too promising at first, until they heard a Barred Owl in the distance. Excitement, however, was saved until towards the end of the survey route, when they heard a Barred Owl close by on one side of the road. It then proceeded to fly over their heads – not quite as exciting as dive-bombing, but almost – but only Renee saw it do so. They also heard one American Woodcock at the beginning of the route.

### **Bird Bash**

June's Bird Bash results should now be posted on the Nipissing Naturalist Club website. Amazing that no one got to any of the lagoons to add to the lower than normal June count! July's Bird Bash is on the **weekend of July 19 and 20.**

## **Bird Wing Outing**

The next outing takes place on **July 22**. Meet at the **Visitor's Centre at 6:30**. At some point before July 22, Dick will email all a reminder and the location(s) of the outing.

*Text and Photos: Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe*