

## Bird Wing Report

September 2017

By Renee Levesque; photos as indicated



Renee Levesque

After our spring and summer hiatus during which we held monthly outings, we returned on September 26 to our regular indoor meetings at the North Bay Public Library.

**Birds Seen:** As usual, after the treasurer's report, we began our meeting by naming and discussing birds seen in the last month.

There were a couple or more weeks in September when there was a dearth of birds, warblers especially. The last wave of warblers were the Palm and Yellow-rumped seen by many and even then, there did not appear to be as many as in previous years. Perhaps weather was a factor, the September heat wave in particular – hot days that seemed more like July days, although not *our* July days this year!

Earlier in September or in late August, there was a fall-out after a rain storm that produced a bit of a variety of warblers, but since then mainly only Palm and Yellow-rumped in their winter or non-breeding plumage. During that fall-out period, Brent Turcotte saw a Canada and a Magnolia Warbler. Seen below is a Palm Warbler in its non-breeding plumage.



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Lori Anderson had a whole family of beautiful Eastern Bluebirds hanging around her yard after not seeing many all summer. And until they migrated, she also had 24 pairs of Barn Swallows,

although she reports that number is lower than in previous years. Eastern Meadowlarks, later migrants, were still present at her farm.

Ken Gowing was still hearing a Gray Catbird at his place, and recently heard both a Barred Owl and a Great Horned Owl. He also recently heard an American Woodcock on several occasions.

Usually in mid-August evenings, Gary and Connie Sturge see a number of Common Nighthawks in their area catching the many dragonflies that hatch around that time. Gary reports lots of dragonflies this year, but he saw only one or two Common Nighthawks. Interestingly, Dick Tafel spotted a Common Nighthawk in mid-day flying over Jocko Point during the September Bird Bash.

Perhaps making up for not seeing many Common Nighthawks, Gary reports seeing more Ruffed Grouse this year than ever. I read in October's issue of *BirdWatching* that populations of Ruffed Grouse appear to be cyclic and tied to the Snowshoe Hare population that roughly follows an 8 to 11-year cycle. When hare numbers crash, their main predators, the Northern Goshawk and the Great Horned

Owl, look to alternate prey, the Ruffed Grouse.

Connie Sturge had a Ruby-throated Hummingbird at her feeder in mid-September, but also more than a hummingbird as you will see in the photo above!

I recently saw the Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets in my yard and we should see more of them.

Sparrows seen included the Savannah and the Song, the Savannah primarily at the lagoons and at Lori's. I had some migrating White-crowned Sparrows (left) in my yard at the time of the meeting and more have no doubt been seen since then. Lori also had House Sparrows at her place,



Connie Sturge



Renee Levesque

as did the Co-op feed store in Verner. Song and White-throated Sparrows appear to be less numerous this fall.

Nuthatches seen were the Red-breasted and the White-breasted, the latter by Grant McKercher. American Goldfinch had not been seen around much during the days leading up to the meeting, but Brent did see some. I had one female in my yard recently clinging to the nyjer feeder and not looking too well.

No one reported American Robins, but they can still be seen, although perhaps not in great numbers. The Rose-breasted Grosbeaks made a bit of an appearance before migrating south. Brent and I both saw an immature Rose-breasted. (seen below)



*Renee Levesque*

In the world of raptors, other than Ken's owls, Connie saw about 40 Turkey Vultures sitting in trees near the Powassan landfill site. Ken saw a Bald Eagle fly over his place; some have seen the American Kestrel; and Grant saw an Osprey as late as September 24, probably the last Osprey in this area until spring.

I saw about 40 American Pipits (below) in the South River area just prior to the meeting and have seen many since. Lori reports up to 100 in the fields at her place. She also saw the Rusty

Blackbird at the time of the meeting, but more have come through our area since.

Curtis Irish had noticed large flocks of Canada Geese and, speaking of geese, I saw a single Snow Goose in early September in the field opposite Warren Lagoon, outstanding among the hundreds of Canada Geese, and then a week later, one at Powassan Lagoon. Since then, some of us have seen four Snow Geese on Osprey



*Renee Levesque*

Links, two adults and two juveniles. And on Gravelle Road near Mattawa, Ernie Frayle spotted, with many Canada Geese, three or four Snow Geese, one being the dark morph Snow Goose, sometimes called the “Blue Goose”, seen well in the photo below. And if that wasn’t enough, in amongst these geese was also a Greater White-fronted Goose, although absent in this photo.



*Ernie Frayle*

In the world of gulls, Curtis reported large flocks of our most common gull, the Ring-billed. Others had seen Herring Gulls, the odd Great Black-backed Gull, and for a short period of time, a large flock of Bonaparte’s at Sunset Park. Our annual November outing to the North Bay landfill site should produce more gulls.

Dick saw a Black-bellied Plover and an American Golden Plover on two of the Lake Nipissing beaches. Both plovers were also seen by Grant and by me, and the Black-bellied by Marc Buchanan. These plovers can be difficult to tell apart, but if they fly, **only** the Black-bellied will have a white rump as you will see in the photo on the right. Other plovers seen were



*Renee Levesque*



*Renee Levesque*

the Killdeer and the Semipalmated.

Another shorebird recently seen was the Sanderling (above), spotted on two of the Lake Nipissing beaches, and seen by Grant, Dick and me and perhaps by others. It is a very active shorebird, a delight to watch as it runs along the sand.

Other shorebirds seen included the Pectoral, Solitary and Baird's Sandpipers at Callander Lagoon; Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs at most of the area lagoons; and Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers, also at most area lagoons. Callander Lagoon had the most shorebirds. For a while, it was the only lagoon with a number of mud flats for the shorebirds. On the whole, the lagoons were not good for our shorebirds this season.



The most common duck of the season, outside the Mallard, was the Wood Duck, many seen at all lagoons, especially Callander Lagoon. Other ducks seen included both teals, the Blue-winged and the Green-

*Donna McQuay*

winged; Northern Shoveler; American Wigeon ( above); Common Goldeneye; Hooded Merganser and Common Merganser, the latter in rafts of about 40, seen by some of us at King's Wharf and at Sunset Park. Look for the Bufflehead at the lagoons now.

Another large raft was that of the Common Loon, up to about 50 at a time, seen by Grant at King's Wharf, and by Dick at Sunset Park. During the summer, Dick kept his eye on a family of loons on Trout Lake and saw the young in front of his house at the time of our meeting.

Pied-billed Grebes were seen at Cache Bay and I recently also saw three Red-necked Grebes there.

**Birds Not Yet Seen:** One group of birds not seen by the time of our September meeting were the Scoters – the White-winged, the Surf and the Black. They should be along soon, although last year, a White-winged was seen and photographed by Marc Buchanan in early August. However, it is not usual to see any scoters here in early August.

**Favourite Sighting of the Summer:** We each had some favourite summer sightings. For Connie, it was a Ruffed Grouse with half a dozen young, as well as the Indigo Bunting; for Ken, our owl man, hearing the Barred and Great Horned Owls; for



*Kaye Edmonds*

Curtis, the Mallard; for Brent, seeing a Golden-crowned Kinglet on a large rock on Marsh Drive; for Grant, the phalaropes, the Wilson's and the Red-necked, the Wilson's seen at Callander Lagoon, and the Wilson's seen with two Red-necks at Verner Lagoon (see photo above, the Wilson's on the left, and the Red-necked on the right, and note the circular ripples in the water, made because when feeding, phalaropes often spin like tops, dabbling at the disturbed water for their food.); for Dick, the Snow Goose and the Common Nighthawk, the latter seen so very clearly; for me the Trumpeter Swan and the story that goes with my sighting. See the October issue of Nipissing Naturalists Club's newsletter for the full story: <https://www.nipnats.com/>.

If others in attendance had a favourite sighting, they either didn't say or I neglected to make a note of their sightings!!

**Awards:** One of the main events of the evening was the presentation of the two trophies, the Nocturnal Owl Survey trophy and the Great Canadian Birdathon trophy. It was our first viewing of the latter, consisting of a shorebird I had donated in the spring that Ken Gowing, our creative designer, mounted on a base over the summer. And what a base – one made to look as if the shorebird is on a rock in the water!

The Nocturnal Owl Survey trophy was presented to Gary and Connie Sturge, photo at right, for their sightings, their adventures and their writing of their survey. I read aloud their submission to the applause of members following the reading. After 5 years of surveying Route 66, Gary and Connie are giving it up. It is quite a distance from their home and in the cold of an April's evening after 3 hours of surveying, not a lot of fun to spend another 1.5 hours driving home and getting to bed late and being groggy the next day! So if anyone would like to take on this lucrative and famed Route 66, you can contact Kathy Jones at [volunteer@birdscanada.org](mailto:volunteer@birdscanada.org).



The Great Canadian Birdathon trophy was presented to Dick, Lori, Brent and me for seeing and hearing the most birds – 106 in total - during May's Great Canadian Birdathon. Only one other team entered and perhaps next May more teams will consider entering now that there is a



*Photos by Grant McKercher*

beautiful mantelpiece trophy at stake! (I understand that in the past there was a cuckoo clock given as a prize, but I have not seen it and no one else has for at least the past 5 years.) Brent

will keep the trophy in a place of honour at his home for three months, then Dick, then Lori and then me.

For raising money during the Great Canadian Birdthon, Dick received from Bird Studies Canada coupons for Armstrong bird seed valued at \$600.00. He graciously shared some of his coupons with his prized team members.

**Winter Finch Forecast:** In his annual winter finch forecast, Ron Pittaway, Ontario Field Ornithologists, predicts a banner winter to see finches in the Northeast. The reason for this optimistic prediction: there is a bumper number of cone crops, the best cone crop in a decade or more.

The finches we should expect to see in the Northeast are White-winged Crossbills, Red Crossbills, Common Redpolls (at right), Hoary Redpolls, Pine Siskins, Purple Finch, Pine Grosbeaks and Evening Grosbeaks. Great news after hardly seeing any redpolls, crossbills and Pine Grosbeaks last winter when the cone crop here was poor.

For more information on the winter finch forecast, read Ron's report in full at: <http://jeaniron.ca/2017/wff17.htm>.

**Dates to Remember:** Project FeederWatch begins on **November 11 and goes to April 6.** To participate, you must join Bird Studies Canada at an annual membership fee of \$35.00. For details and instructions, see: <http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pfw/>.

Last year, as part of Project FeederWatch, I submitted a photograph of a Blue Jay deep in the snow to Cornell Lab of Ornithology. It was chosen as one of the many photos to be given space in the 2018 U.S. calendar – for February.

Also mark on your calendar **Saturday, December 16** as our **Christmas Bird Count** day – for the 39<sup>th</sup> year! Lori Anderson will once again act as compiler. Please contact Lori at [lori.anderson58@hotmail.com](mailto:lori.anderson58@hotmail.com) if you wish to participate either on one of the routes or as a feeder watcher, counting birds in your own back yard. All feeder watchers must be within a 15-mile radius of North Bay. Further information will be available at November's meeting.

**Books:** Due to unforeseen circumstances, Kaye Edmonds was not at the meeting so was not able to give a summary of one of the chapters she read in *More the Birds: Adventurous Lives of North American Naturalists* by Val Shushkewich. Next meeting, Kaye!



Nicole Richardson

But we are now onto another great book, *Birdology*, by Sy Montgomery, a best-selling author who, according to her website, has been chased by a gorilla, embraced by an octopus, undressed by an orangutan and loved by a pig named Christopher Hogwood. In *Birdology*, Sy writes wonderful, vivid personal accounts about parrots, hens, hawks, hummingbirds, Homing Pigeons, American Crows and Cassowaries. One of the parrots some of you may be familiar with is Snowball, a dancing Cockatoo, made famous by the 2007 You Tube video that went viral,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJOZp2ZftCw>.

**You must watch!**

**Next Bird Wing Meeting:** October's Bird Wing meeting will take place on **Tuesday, October 24**. Because the library book sale is on at that time and the Board Room has already been taken, **we will hold a daytime bird outing. Time and location to be announced, so stayed tuned!**

"Sy Montgomery does for birds what Jane Goodall did for apes." —Stacey O'Brien, author of *Wesley the Owl*

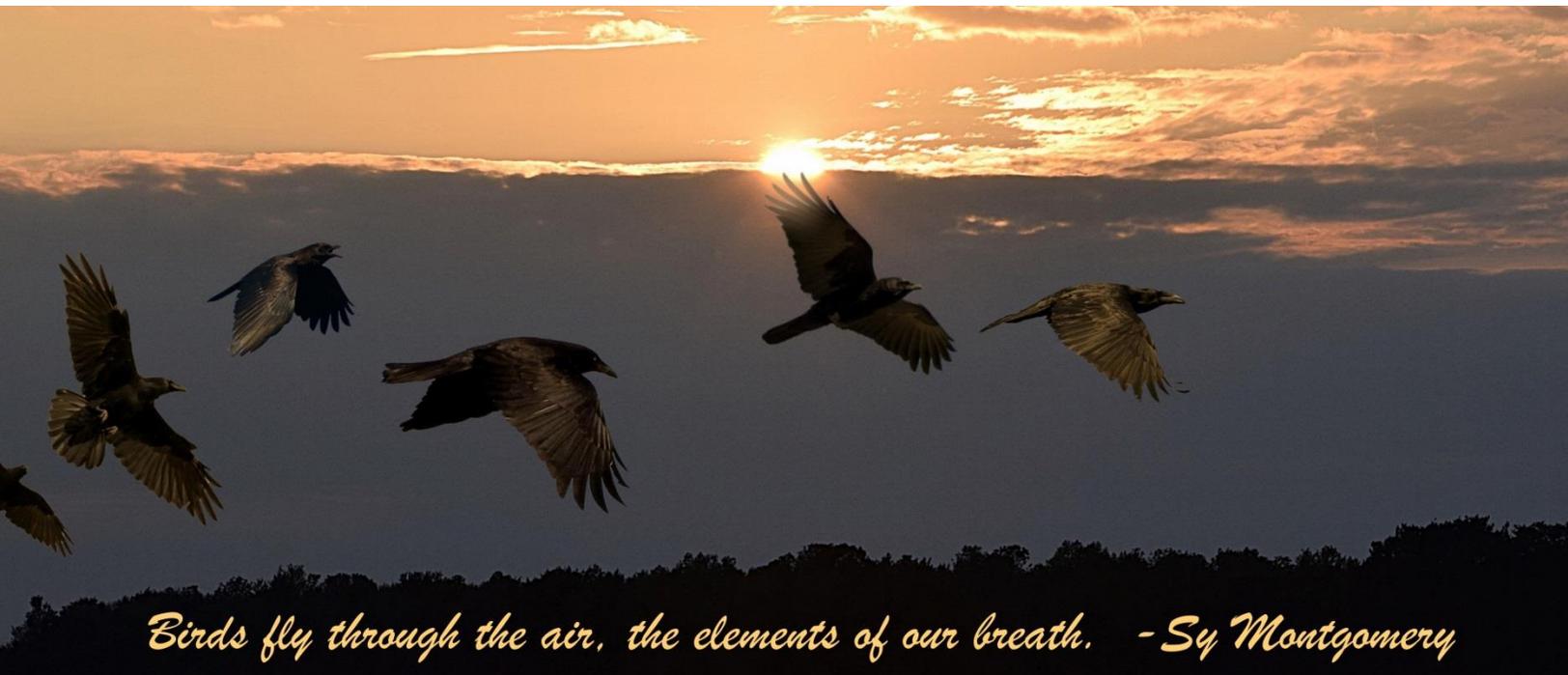
*New York Times* bestselling author of the National Book Award Finalist *The Soul of an Octopus*

sy montgomery

adventures with hip hop parrots,  
cantankerous cassowaries,  
crabby crows, peripatetic pigeons,  
hens, hawks, and hummingbirds



birdology



*Birds fly through the air, the elements of our breath. - Sy Montgomery*