

Nipissing Area Bird Bash

December 2016

By Dick Tafel, compiler

A record number of birds seen by 25 local observers this past weekend was **57**, five more than the previous high in 2015. This record may have been due to the fairly placid weather, both during and prior to the event.

Starting with new birds for the year, in rough taxonomic order, we can commence with a Cackling Goose, seen among a few late-migrant Canada Geese off the Amelia Beach area of Lake Nipissing by Renee Levesque and her associate, your compiler. This goose can be hard to identify one must confess, but its close proximity, its short bill, small size (not much bigger than adjacent Mallards) and short neck that was very evident in flight were the marks of confirmation. Then there was a cute, female Harlequin Duck seen by the same pair a fair distance from the Government Dock. A scope was necessary for this rare for-around-here identification.

And now to the gulls! A visit to the North Bay landfill site brought forth for the first time on the Bird Bash this year, the three main Arctic gulls often seen here at this time: Thayer's, Iceland, and Glaucous. They were seen by the first mentioned duo, while at the Sundridge landfill site, Stephen O'Donnell also found the latter pair. Thayer's is always tough to identify, but there were so many gulls, perhaps 1,000, at the North Bay site, that after a while one can zoom in upon one or two slightly different ones (different from the Iceland and the Herrings) so that their distinct differences may be discovered.

Now to the other birds located: Strangely, a couple of Double-crested Cormorants were still around, one seen by Grant and Shirley McKercher within Callander Bay, and one seen by Paul Smylie at the easterly edge of Trout Lake. Canada Geese were noted in small numbers by many of you, invariably within the waters, not on the land. Three Trumpeter Swans, one a juvenile, were observed by the Levesque pair off Jocko Point Road, while several Tundra Swans were found near Sturgeon Falls by Therez Violette.

Mallards were noted by many of you, along with just a few American Black Ducks. Stephen found a Surf Scoter and Ring-necked Ducks within Lake Bernard, the latter also noted by Keith near South River. Buffleheads and Common Goldeneyes were fairly common still within the major lakes. Hooded and Common Mergansers were also still around in fair numbers. And that completes the December duck population.

Among predators, the Red-tailed Hawk was noted by Gary and Connie Sturge near

Powassan and by the Levesque pair near the North Bay landfill site. They saw another and a Rough-legged Hawk along Highway 17 West. Bald Eagles are seemingly even more common this year - many at the North Bay landfill site and at other landfill sites within the area. A Merlin was noticed sweeping across the sky in West Ferris by the Levesque duo.

Ruffed Grouse were still fairly common, discovered among other spotters by Kaye Edmunds and by Donna Demarco in the east end. Wild Turkeys, some 19 of them, were observed by Keith Thornborrow in South River, and fewer by Lori Anderson and her son, Graham, east of Powassan. Kaye also found a couple.

Other than first-for-the-year gulls that were previously mentioned, seen were Herring Gulls, now in huge numbers, Ring-bill Gulls, much fewer now, although noted by many, and a few Black-backed Gulls observed by the Levesque duo.

Mourning Doves were seen by several, including Therez, Kaye and Donna.

Now to woodpeckers: A Red-bellied has apparently found a temporary home at Mary Young's place near Corbeil. Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers were very common all over, while the Pileated was noted by Chris Sukha near Field and by Elsa Tafel and Mary Ann Kenrick at their feeders. Still no Black-backs since March, however.

Passerines (perching or song-birds): We should start with the proposed Canada's bird, the Gray Jay. The only observer in our whole area this month (is this really to be Canada's bird?) was Keith Thornborrow near South River. Blue Jays, however, were seen by almost everyone. American Crows were somewhat less common, but Common Ravens seem to have taken up much of the slack.

Back-capped Chickadees and both nuthatches were still almost everywhere, but Brown Creepers were noted only by the McKerchers and by Mary, both near their homes.

A few American Robins were still around - a very pretty, dark-plumaged pair noted by the Levesque duo in Pinewood, and one at the end of Macpherson Drive in East Ferris seen by Paul.

A very large flock of Bohemian Waxwings (hundreds) were enjoyed by Therez in Sturgeon Falls.

Then we get some widely dispersed sparrows: American Trees were at the homes of Lori and Graham, Steve Pitt, Ernie Frayle, and Mary. She also had a White-throat which was also seen by John Levesque at his place. A Song Sparrow was staying around Keith's home, and Dark-eyed Juncos were at the feeder areas of Helen McCombie, the

McKerchers and Stephen. Snow Buntings were found by the Levesque duo and the Anderson group, including Ken Gowing.

The magnificent Northern Cardinal is staying about in a few places and noted by the Levesque pair in Pinewood and by Kaye at her feeder.

A Red-winged Blackbird is seemingly staying around the home of Steve Pitt, while a Common Grackle is likewise at Therez's.

Purple Finches were observed at Mary's and by Chris in Field. He also saw the only group of Common Redpolls. Pine Siskins were at a few places including Ernie's and Stephen's. American Goldfinches seem to be the main finch of the winter and seen by Pam and Peter Handley, Mary Ann, the Anderson combo, among others. Evening Grosbeaks were at many places.

And finally the House Sparrow, seen only by the Sturges and by the Anderson duo, all near Powassan.

And so that completes December's record list! Congrats to all! Next month's Bird Bash will not be until the **weekend of January 14**. Bet we don't see as many then!

In the meantime, enjoy a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!