

Bird Wing Report January 2018

By Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe; photos as indicated

The first meeting of the New Year was to have been held on January 23, but the heavy snow that day resulted in the meeting being cancelled and rescheduled for January 30 in the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library. As usual, it was a very lively meeting with lots to talk about – perhaps because we had not had a meeting since November. The janitor must have been concerned we would stay past 9:00 p.m. because he came into the room at 8:45 to remind us to start wrapping it up!

Birds Seen in January:

Harris's Sparrow: Two rare birds in our area were seen during the month of January. Gary and Luanne Chowns have had a Harris's Sparrow coming to their feeders since January 12. The Chowns's backyard is certainly a well-stocked and lovely feeding area for birds, and so if a Harris's had to take shelter and feed anywhere during some mighty cold and snowy days, good thing it found the Chowns! It still continues to come daily and we expect it will for the rest of the winter. Gary has had out-of-town birders come to see it, including a group from Hamilton.



Gary Chowns

The Harris's Sparrow is a very distinctive and handsome sparrow and the largest sparrow in North America. It is Canada's only endemic breeder, breeding in the open tundra, primarily in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. In winter, it is found in the south-central plains of the United States, from lower South Dakota to upper Texas. Always of interest how these more western and southern birds find their way here for the winter.

Those of you who subscribe to ONTBIRDS will know that Josh Vandermuelen keeps a winter bird list of birds seen during the months of December, January and February. I checked out his list after I heard about the Harris's Sparrow and saw one had not yet been seen in Ontario this winter. Therefore, I emailed Josh to let him know one was in North Bay. You can view the

winter bird list at:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1umLLsr70JMC85hbAq82tryI1Jz55M8oRGxapWBr7dIc/edit?pref=2&pli=1#gid=0>. You will see North Bay mentioned on the left side of Josh's spread sheet under "Most recent additions".

Gary reports he saw a Harris's Sparrow in North Bay about 20 years ago, and Dick Tafel reports seeing one in Cache Bay on February 5, 1995.

House Finch: I had a surprise visitor at my feeder on January 22 – a House Finch! I understand from others this species, common in Southern Ontario, was seen in our area more frequently 15 or so years ago. House Finches have been hit hard with conjunctivitis, so perhaps that is why they are no longer common here. At first glance, I thought it was a Purple Finch, but the colour and the markings seemed just different enough to have me run to my binoculars and field guide to confirm it was a House Finch. It came to the feeder on and off from late morning to early afternoon when a Barred Owl came swooping into my yard, scaring off all the birds and startling me as I was about to come in after filling the feeders. The regulars returned, but the House Finch didn't.

It can sometimes be difficult to tell the House Finch and Purple Finch apart at a glance. The House Finch's red is more a classic red or a red-orange, whereas the red on the Purple Finch is more of a pink or more of a raspberry colour. And the red on the House Finch is confined to the forehead, brow and upper chest, whereas the red on the Purple Finch extends onto the nape, back, chest and flanks. Also, the House Finch has streaked undertail coverts, while the Purple Finch has white. In the photos below, you can certainly see the difference in the amount of red on the head of the two finches.



House Finch (left) and Purple Finch, Renee Levesque

Unfortunately, the House Finch, an introduced species of eastern North America, is competing with and displacing the native Purple Finch.

Other Uncommon Winter Birds: Gary Chowns has had a White-throated Sparrow coming to his feeders since early December; I have had a Chipping Sparrow coming to mine, also since early December; and Gary and Connie Sturge, a Common Grackle.

Lori Anderson occasionally and very briefly gets a Red-bellied Woodpecker. She last saw it about a week before our meeting. I believe the Red-bellied is no longer coming to Kaye Edmonds' or Mary Ann Kenrick's feeders, although Kaye has been getting Northern Cardinals, a male and two females.



Kaye Edmonds

Owls: Other than the Barred Owl that swooped into my yard on January 22, the only other owl that had been seen, but a good one, was the Snowy Owl, seen by Brent Turcotte on Memorial Drive and by Lori at her farm in Chisholm Township. The one on Memorial seems to be the same Snowy Owl some of us have seen since first reported in December. Dick got a great view of it one day when it sat on top of the large mound by the volleyball courts at the end of Wyld Street.

A surveillance video from Cobourg, Ontario, of a Snowy Owl and a fox is an interesting watch as the fox does a “dance” around the Snowy while the Snowy keeps a close eye on every move the fox makes. It would seem as if the fox has not come across a Snowy Owl before and doesn't know quite know what to make of it. The video is just over 3 minutes in length and there is no sound. See: <https://www.mnn.com/earth-matters/animals/stories/fox-snowy-owl-met-winter-night>.

Eagles: Gary Sturge saw three Bald Eagles on the famed Stillaway Line.

Grouse: Grant McKercher had a Ruffed Grouse at his place. This winter there are many to be seen. There hasn't been a time when I have been out birding when I haven't seen at least a couple of them. Therez Violette recently had four in her yard and Ernie Frayle reports that as many as 10 come within 15 feet of his house when it snows!

Ducks: Mary Marrs saw Mallards flying overhead and Gary Chowns has about 20 at his place. During the winter months, there are many at the water treatment plant, along with a few American Black Ducks. Mallards can also be seen in the small section of open water by the Green Store. Other ducks seen were five Common Goldeneye, seen by Dick and me near Holden Dam in Mattawa.

Woodpeckers: Other than the Red-bellied, other woodpeckers seen were the regulars – Hairy, Downy and Pileated. No Black-backed Woodpeckers have yet to be seen, and I expect someday to receive an email from Gary Sturge telling me he saw one on Stillaway Line. (How many times have I gone down that road and seen not a bird!)



Stephen O'Donnell

Other Birds: Ken Gowing had a couple of Pine Siskins (above) and one Common Redpoll in with a flock of American Goldfinch. Both Gary Sturge and Lori have had a flock of siskins, and Dick Tafel saw a flock of Common Redpolls on Cooks Mill and on Cedar Heights Roads.

Doug Patterson Sr. had Pine Grosbeaks which seem to be almost everywhere this winter. He also had about 20 Evening Grosbeaks coming to his feeders daily. Therez Violette also has had Evening Grosbeaks at her feeders in Sturgeon Falls.

Grant McKercher had one Purple Finch coming to his feeder, as did Dick and Lori, but on one occasion only.

These finches seem to be fairly scarce this winter so far.

White-winged Crossbills, pictured at right, had been seen by Gary and Connie Sturge on Maple Hill Road and by Lori in the east end of Chisholm

Township. Red Crossbills were not been seen by anyone.

Red-breasted Nuthatches seem to be fairly common this winter, White-breasted less so.

For most of the winter, Lori has had Snow Buntings at her place, sometimes up to 120 of them. As well, she has had up to five Lapland Longspurs



Stephen O'Donnell



Steve Pitt

Connie saw a Northern Shrike on Maple Hill Road, another famed road in the Powassan area.

Gary and Connie get 10 to 12 Mourning Doves at their place, although the number had been as high as 20. Steve Pitt also had Mourning Doves at his place on Talon Lake and it would seem one has lost or injured a leg as it was using its wing as a crutch. (See photo at left.) Steve reports that it was holding his own, nevertheless.

Despite the fact the Sturges don't have a farm or a barn, they have had about 30 House Sparrows coming to their yard in the couple of weeks before the meeting. Gary reports they displaced the Dark-eyed Juncos and the American Tree Sparrows.

There seem to be more American Tree Sparrows this winter than most. I have had anywhere from 8 to 11 in my yard all winter.

Curtis Irish and Mary Marrs saw American Crows in town, and Curtis also saw Blue Jays. Common Ravens were seen in the outlying areas. And, of course, there were the ever-present, faithful Black-capped Chickadees, one of Doug Patterson Jr.'s named birds, along with American Goldfinch, also seen by many in large flocks.

And finally, there is the handsome Bohemian Waxwing (below), seen recently by Therez in her yard. The only other known sighting was by Dick and me, a flock of 40 to 50, in Pinewood subdivision about a month ago.



Renee Levesque

Gray Jay: Dick and I saw two Gray Jays on Cooks Mill Road and at least four on Roy Drive. On Cooks Mill, they were busy at the suet feeders in the front yard of a home about halfway down the road, and on Roy Drive, they were busy taking something from the porch of the second last house at the end of that road. It was great to see so many of these remarkable birds which may become our national bird if the government can be convinced we should have a national bird as most other countries do. Well, maybe calling it by its original name, Canada Jay, could do the trick, and we may not be far off from having the name changed.

A joint proposal to change the name from Gray Jay to Canada Jay was made to the American Ornithological Society (AOS) by Dan Strickland, well-known Canadian expert of the Gray Jay, and Carla Cicero, American ornithologist. This proposal was supported by five Canadian ornithologists, including the president of the Society of Canadian Ornithologists. The AOS decision is expected to be announced in July 2018. (From Ron Pittaway's article, "Canada Jay

Name Change Proposal”, that appeared in the Toronto Ornithological Club Newsletter, February 2018.)

Sightings from the Field: Mary Young provided this dynamic report of a Snowy Owl and Peregrine Falcon that she witnessed from her office in late January: “I was at work today, and my office window faces the waterfront at the end of Wyld and Oak Streets. I was very pleased to see a Snowy Owl (below) fly over the building towards the lake and land on the man-made hill just beside the beach volleyball courts. Good sighting, right? Then I was totally amazed when a Peregrine Falcon swooped in right behind it and started dive bombing the owl! At first I thought it was a Common Raven, but when I was able to get a better look, I realized that it was probably a Peregrine. The dive-bombing went on for about five minutes or so. I retrieved my emergency binoculars from my car and walked closer to the action to confirm the Peregrine identification. It sat on a telephone pole for a few minutes so I was able to get a good look at it. Nice adult bird, with the distinctive facial markings and a slaty back. The owl was an immature, quite dark. The Peregrine gave up after about 15 minutes, but the owl stayed on the hill for



Gray Jay, Renee Levesque



Renee Levesque

another 4 hours. I thought the owl had some prey in its talons when I first saw it, but wasn't able

to confirm this. I might have seen it eat something after the dive bombing, but again, I wasn't sure. To see either of these birds on their own is exciting, but together, truly awesome!"

(Note: Although many of us have tried to find this Peregrine by roaming the streets of downtown, I know of only Fred Pinto and Shirley McKercher, in addition to Mary, having seen it.)

And just as I saw a Barred Owl (right) in my yard, so did Kevan Cowcill. He reports his was chasing squirrels one morning. "One of the young squirrels leaped from one tree to another and the owl almost got him in mid-air. Very impressive. It stayed around till after 12, then in the evening when I let the dogs out, it was sitting on top of the bird feeder pole. Both owl and dogs were startled!"

(Note: My Barred Owl was also sitting on top of the feeder pole the night before it came swooping into my yard. I saw it around 9:30 in the evening looking exceptionally large and intimidating. I knew then there were mice or moles or voles or shrews around, but as long as they stayed outside or the owl caught them, I was fine. As many of you know, for me a mouse in the house is a totally different situation. Then panic sets in.)



Renee Levesque

Special Thanks: A special thank you went out to Ken Gowing for designing and making two magnificent bases for our two trophies, the Nocturnal Owl Survey trophy and the Great Canadian Birdathon trophy.

Motus Wildlife Tracking System: As most of you know by now, the installation of the Motus Wildlife Tracking System is a go and Nipissing Naturalists Club and North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority hope of have it installed in May with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Bird

Wing members agreed to donate a third of the money we have in our account in support of this project and accordingly, we donated \$100.00.



Kaye Edmonds

Great Backyard Bird Count: It is time once again for the Great Backyard Bird Count which takes place for four days over the Family Day weekend, **February 16 to 19**. Anyone can take part in this free Citizen Science Project. In other words, you don't need to be a paid member of Bird Studies Canada. All you have to do is watch birds during these days for as little as 15 minutes on one or more days and enter your sightings. Those who are members of Bird Studies Canada and enter sightings on eBird, just continue to do so. For more information, visit: <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/get-started/>.

If you can write an “exciting, inspiring, funny or heartwarming” story about the Great Backyard Bird Count by using only 200 to 400 words, you can enter it in Bird Studies Canada’s Great Backyard Bird Count story contest. The contest is open only from February 16 to March 2, 2018. The winner will receive a Bird Studies Canada membership and a National Geographic Field Guide. There will be two honourable mentions, but not sure what they will win. For

details visit: <http://www.birdscanada.org/news/the-bird-studies-canada-gbbc-story-contest-2>.

And, as usual, there will also be a photo contest to celebrate “the beauty and diversity of wild birds seen during the count from around the world.” All images must be taken during the current Great Backyard Bird Count, and they are to be of wild birds in their natural surroundings. Photos that appear to be harmful to birds will not be considered. You can submit up to 10 images per category, but the same image cannot be submitted in multiple categories. You must name the species and indicate where the photo was taken. Categories include: overall, habitat, behaviour, group, composition and people. For details visit: <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/photo-contest-rules/>.

Eastern Bluebird Nest Box Survey: The Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society is conducting nest box surveys of Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows to gather information on nest box trails across Ontario. If you or someone you know will be monitoring nest boxes, Bill Read, president

of the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society, would like you to complete a reporting form which you can download from the bluebird website, <http://www.oebs.ca/>, once the 2018 form is posted. Alternatively, you can send the information in an email to Bill at his interesting email address, billreadsbooks@gmail.com. Other than Lori Anderson doing some semi-monitoring when she has time from her busy farm work, we at Bird Wing are not aware of anyone else who will be monitoring these species, but if you know of someone, please pass this information along.

Christmas Bird Count Results: Lori Anderson, compiler, gave a summary of our 39th Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Her summary as it appeared in February's newsletter, *The Woodland Observer*, is attached as a separate attachment. A big thank you to Lori, to the McKerchers, and to all the field observers and feeder watchers for another successful CBC.

Christmas Bird Counts Past: Dick Tafel showed us some of the Christmas Bird Count books, books that were published and sent to all compilers in the years before results were posted online. It is interesting to learn not only what birds were seen then and how many of each was seen, but also the number of field observers and feeder watchers. (And also the names of all field observers and compilers. Some like Dick, Marc Buchanan, and Grant and Shirley were recognizable.)



Hairy Woodpecker, Renee Levesque

Dick concentrated on two years in particular, 1994 and 1999. In 1994, North Bay was 6th in all of North America for having the largest number of participants, 169. First was Edmonton that year. Being sixth was quite good, but the thinking was, if we can be sixth, why not try for first, and by 1999 that goal was achieved with North Bay in first place with 1011 participants – 43 field observers and 968 feeder watchers. Edmonton came second that year, followed by Victoria. And for the next few years, North Bay maintained its first place finish.

In 1994, North Bay had the greatest number of Evening Grosbeaks seen, 2219, and the greatest number of Purple Finch, 1039. In 1999, we had the largest number of Hairy Woodpeckers seen – that continued for a number of years – and the largest number of Ruffed Grouse seen.

We look forward to our 40th CBC in December 2018, a scant 10.5 months from now.

Celebrating 100 Years: To mark 100 years of bird conservation and the 100th year of ratifying the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, Environment and Climate Change Canada issued a coffee table book in which I am featured. I became aware of this project when Sarah Wheelan sent me an email last September from Environment and Climate Change Canada, one I forwarded to all Bird Wingers and which Sarah posted on Nipissing Naturalists Club's Facebook. I had a very limited time – about 2 days - to submit a 100-word story about a bird and find a photo of me in nature. Because I had just written about Ava the Trumpeter Swan for the September issue of *The Woodland Observer*, I had my story, but to boil it down to 100 words, just 2 or 3 sentences, was the trick. Still, I got it done and submitted it and it was accepted. Whether it was the writing or the fact no one else had written about Trumpeter Swans or a combination of both, I don't know. The book consists of 100 birders in alphabetical order and their stories. There is a photo of each of the birders and usually, but not always, a photo of the bird they write about, and a photo not always taken by the person who wrote the story.

The book is now available online at:

<http://www.publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.846397/publication.html>. Once you open this link, you must then scroll down to just under the pink area where it provides two view links. You have a choice between the higher and lower resolution links.

If you want to check out my story, scroll down until you come to Levesque (page 66 in the book, but page 68 on the online version), make sure you have a full screen and enlarge to 75%. But be sure you read everyone's story and look at the photos.

Calendar: Like Bird Studies Canada, Cornell Lab of Ornithology puts out a calendar every year and this year, my photo of a Blue Jay in the snow was chosen for February, along with birds and comments from other birders.

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH BARB SENDELBACH LAFAYETTE TOWNSHIP, NJ		FEBRUARY 2018					
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	
					1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
			Louis Agassiz Fuertes, bird artist, b. 1874				
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
	Great Backyard Bird Count ends PRESIDENTS' DAY			Great Backyard Bird Count begins			
25	26	27	28				
							
PINE GROSBEEK JOAN WIITANEN, TEAR LAKE, MI				PURPLE FINCH, GARY MUELLER, ROLLA, MO			
							
						BLUE JAY RENEE LEVESQUE, NORTH BAY, ON	

I am so happy that I started participating! Not only is it an uplifting activity when the winter doldrums bring me down, but I am happy to be part of such important bird data collection and research. I am intrigued as I watch the trends of my visiting Eurasian Collared-Doves, for example. I am seeing a shift in the length of time that they visit my yard during the winter months, and I owe that to being part of Project Feeder Watch!
SUSAN SZESZOL, RIVER GROVE, IL

I love to watch the Blue Jays come to eat peanuts out of the feeder. They line up on various branches like planes on the runway waiting for their turn. The first bird will choose a peanut and fly off, then the next will land and make his pick, and then the next. The other day there were eight rotating through until all the peanuts were gone.
NANCY WATERMAN, HANOVER, MD

Magazine Article: In the East Ferris magazine, fall and winter 2017 edition, Dick had an article published entitled “Birding in East Ferris”. Another article on birds by Dick will appear in the spring edition. It is a great little magazine and worth picking up and reading.

Book reviews: Curtis Irish read *More than Birds: Adventurous Lives of North American Naturalists* by Val Shushkewich. He highlighted for us his two preferences – the chapter on Louise de Kiriline Lawrence and the chapter on Robert Bateman.

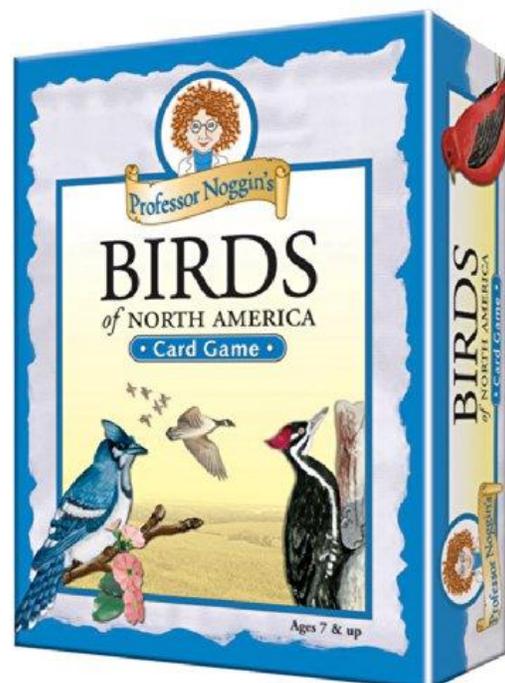
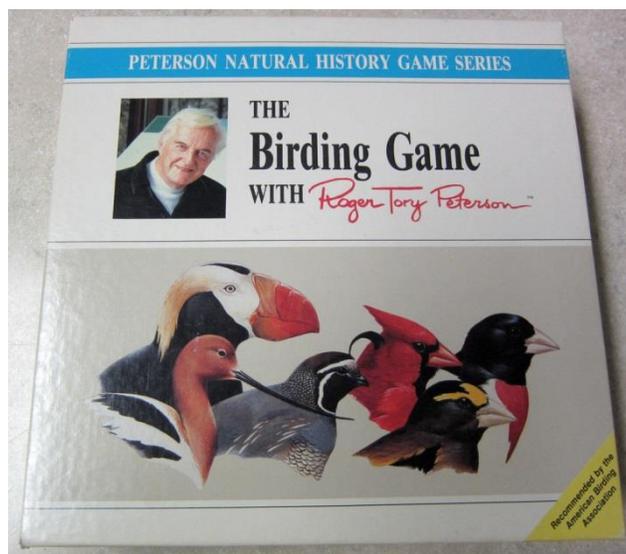
This was followed by Lori Anderson’s review of *Birdology* by Sy Montgomery. Lori found it to be beautifully written and particularly liked the chapter on parrots, entitled, “Birds Can Talk”.

You may recall that Connie liked the *Birdology* chapter on homing pigeons. She mentioned that she has since discovered that North Bay and area has its own Racing Pigeon Club, run by Guido Farelli.

Grant McKercher wrote an excellent review of *Birds Art Life* by Kyo Maclear for the January 2018 issue of *The Woodland Observer* (page 16). Be sure to read it at <https://www.nipnats.com/newsletters/>.

Board Games: Connie demonstrated one of the Peterson natural history board games, “The Birding Game”. This board game is from 1990 and is like a Monopoly/Trivial Pursuit game, only about birds. I don’t see it on Amazon.ca, but it is available on Amazon.com at <https://www.amazon.com/Birding-Roger-Peterson-Natural-History/dp/B004NY5YCI>.

Dick demonstrated another board game, “Professor Noggin’s Birds of North America”. It is a card game that combines trivia, true and false and multiple choice questions. It too is available on amazon.com at <https://www.amazon.com/Professor-Noggins-Birds-North-America/dp/B00008W75N>. Both games would make excellent teaching tools – and enhance birding skills.



Window Collisions: We are all concerned about birds hitting our windows. Doug Patterson had tried putting decals all over his windows, his large living room window in particular, but he found that the decals were not always effective. They fall off; they need replacing; it can be difficult to position them well over a large expanse of glass; and ladders are needed to place them on some windows and climbing ladders can present a safety hazard. Therefore, when Doug and his father decided to replace the windows in their home with mullion windows, they hoped that by dividing up the glass area into small squares, window collisions would be reduced. Doug states, “The mullions are generally quite visible even on bright days and break up the window reflections and hopefully give the birds some clues.” The windows Doug and his father have ordered also come with screens on the outside that may also help further reduce window reflection.

Doug tells us there is a hydro energy rebate program available at this time for anyone thinking of replacing their windows. For details see: <https://greenon.ca/>.

I don't see mullion windows listed as an alternative on the FLAP Canada (Fatal Light Awareness Program) website, so I emailed FLAP Canada to ask about them about these windows. I am waiting to hear back from them.

Bird Bash: The next Bird Bash takes place the same weekend as the Great Backyard Bird Count, only on two of those days, not all four – **over the weekend of February 17 and 18.**

Bird Wing: The next Bird Wing meeting is on **Tuesday, February 27, starting at 6:30 p.m. in the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library.**

Thanks to Steve Pitt, I will once again end this month's report with a word that comes from a bird. Last month it was raven-messenger; this month it is the word, canard. As we know, *canard* means duck in French – from the old French word *quanart*, meaning drake. There was a 16th century French idiom, *vendre des canards à moitié*, literally meaning to half-sell ducks, a colourful way of saying to fool or to cheat because obviously one cannot half-sell ducks. Today it means a false or unfounded report or a groundless rumour or belief, as in: The report circulating that the Snowy Owl is snatching little dogs off the streets of North Bay is a canard.



Wood Duck, Donna McQuay