

# Bird Wing Report

September 26, 2016

*By Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe. Photos as indicated.*

The first indoor meeting of the season was held in the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library on September 26. This report is a tad late, but there was *The Woodland Observer* to get out and there was Thanksgiving and there were fall household chores to get done – and still not done! – and I could go on and on, offering many excuses.

**Birds Seen During the Summer and in September:** I am not going to list all the birds seen over the summer. Suffice it to say that most birds that could have been seen were seen. But instead I will concentrate on some of the larger flocks of migrants seen recently, the more unusual sightings and anything else that strikes my fancy.

At the time of our meeting, White-crowned Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos had just begun to arrive and have gathered in strength since. They are birds we haven't seen since spring, although some may have seen Dark-eyed Juncos and I once had a White-crowned Sparrow in my yard in July.

Some consider White-crowns with their bold black and white head stripes to be the handsomest of our sparrows. (The immature White-crowns, pictured at right, have brown and tan head stripes which they keep until the spring.) You are bound to see many of them popping out from low shrubs as you



*Photo by Stephen O'Donnell*

drive or walk the back roads.

When you see a large flock of birds with prominent white outer tail feathers flying suddenly up into a tree from the ground or from low vegetation when disturbed, you know they are Dark-eyed Juncos.

Another northern sparrow not seen since the spring is the handsome Fox Sparrow. These sparrows are not seen as often in the fall as they are in the spring, but Gary Sturge did see one near his place. The next northern sparrow to arrive in large numbers is the American Tree Sparrow and by the time you read this report, some, if not many, will have arrived.

It seems more Lincoln Sparrows than usual were seen this summer and Lori Anderson was still seeing them at her place well into September. Others have seen them at Callander Lagoon. Lots of Savannah Sparrows were seen at both Callander and Verner Lagoons – Swamp Sparrows too – and a Vesper Sparrow was seen at the airport in South River.

I think – and not just because I saw one – that the Le Conte's (right) is the prettiest of all the sparrows. One was seen on September 22 by Dick Tafel and me at Verner Lagoon. It was a delight to see and it offered us some great views for over five minutes, unusual for such a shy bird. Every summer since I have been a member of Bird Wing, we have gone looking for the Le Conte's on River Road and once we got a quick glimpse of one, but so quick that I felt I never really saw it. This time I certainly did.

During September, many noticed large flocks of Palm Warblers, recognized by their constant



*Photo by Renee Levesque*

wagging tail. Many other warblers were seen during September, including the Blackpoll, Bay-breasted and Orange-crowned, warblers not as frequently seen as others. Also seen was Dick's favourite warbler, the Black-throated Blue male which he saw on the trail near Champlain Park.

Not many vireos were around by meeting time, although Brent Turcotte saw a Philadelphia Vireo in Champlain Park during the September Bird Bash just before our meeting. The woods seem so silent without the constant song of the Red-eyed Vireo. Once or twice during the summer I wished one would stay quiet long enough so I could make out another bird song and now I regret ever having such a thought.

Also there were not many flycatchers around by meeting time, although Eastern Phoebes were still being seen, one by Kaye Edmonds in Laurier Woods.



*Photo by Stephen O'Donnell*

In the world of raptors, Brent saw a Red-tailed Hawk (left) in Laurier Woods. Steve Pitt had a Northern Goshawk in his yard.

The Ruby-throated Hummingbird departed from most of our backyards around

September 10 to 13, but Marc

Buchanan still had one near his Lakeshore Drive home just a few days before the meeting.

Although both nuthatches are being seen, it seems there are more White-breasted Nuthatches being seen this fall than Red-breasted.

Lori was still seeing the lovely Eastern Bluebird near her place. She reports a pair nested across the road from her house this summer.

Rusty blackbirds (right) arrived as usual this September, one at Sunset Park, a couple at Callander Lagoon, one or two elsewhere, and larger flocks of up to 10 in West Nipissing.



*Photo by Lisa Hackett*

Most of the migrating shorebirds normally seen here in the fall were seen – Lesser Yellowlegs, Greater Yellowlegs, Pectoral Sandpipers, Least Sandpipers, Semipalmated Sandpipers and Wilson’s Snipe to name

some – but in seemingly fewer numbers than usual. Some of the not so common shorebirds seen were Sanderlings along the Lake Nipissing shoreline; Baird’s Sandpiper at Verner Lagoon and Sunset Park; Black-bellied Plovers at Sunset Park

and elsewhere along the Lake Nipissing shoreline; and a juvenile American Golden Plover (left) at Sunset Park and elsewhere along the Lake Nipissing shoreline. Spotted Sandpipers which remain



*Photo by Renee Levesque*

here during the summer were also seen.

Swallows had basically all but migrated by the time of the meeting, although Lori and Gary and Connie Sturge had recently seen Barn Swallows.

The only owl reported was the Barred Owl, heard by me for a couple of nights as I fell off to sleep. Both Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes were seen, the former at Verner Lagoon and the latter at Callander Lagoon.



*Photo by Renee Levesque*

Many Bonaparte Gulls (above) were seen at Sunset and some on Lake Nipissing at Jocko Point. Not too many Great Black-backs were seen – one at Sunset Park and two or three along the Lake Nipissing shoreline.

All the ducks that are normally seen turned up, including the not-as-frequently seen Northern Pintail, observed by some at Callander and Warren Lagoons, and Red-headed Ducks, seen primarily at Callander Lagoon. Marc saw a White-winged Scoter earlier than usual, in August, in Lake Nipissing. Marc's photo of this scoter is in August's Bird Wing report. The White-winged has been seen by others since.

Three Common Gallinules were seen by Dick and me at Cache Bay during the September Bird Bash. We had heard one in August during a canoe trip at Cache Bay, but it was so much nicer to actually see one, never mind to see the three we saw.

The species garnering the most attention at September's meeting were the large flocks of Sandhill Cranes massing in fields getting ready to migrate south. Everyone loves seeing these tall, elegant birds with their crimson caps. The adults are silver/gray with long black legs, a pale cheek and a red crown. Some adults are stained a rusty colour from iron-rich mud (left). The juveniles are gray and rusty brown without the pale cheek and the red crown. Most were seen in West Nipissing where at least a thousand in total



*Photo by Kaye Edmonds*

had gathered in various fields along Levac and Leclair Roads and the other roads nearby.

Canada Geese were also seen in large flocks, and although any large flock is exciting to see, when we see Canada Geese at this time of the year, what we are looking for among them are Snow Geese. Lori saw one fly over her place (below) with a flock of Canada Geese. By the next meeting in October, others will no doubt have seen them.



*Photo by Renee Levesque*

Other gathering flocks were American Crows, Common Grackles and European Starlings. If you are fortunate, you will get to see the starlings perform their aerial dance. It is truly amazing. If you don't get to see it and even if you do, check out this video: <https://vimeo.com/58291553>



*Photo by Ken Gowing*

**Owl Award:** In April, many of us took part in the Nocturnal Owl Survey as we have every year. But this year when I received the submissions, I decided that Lori Anderson's and Ken Gowing's, (aka "Ken Gooding" according to one prominent member of our group) submission was so outstanding in terms of the number of owls seen and the sounds heard – Killdeer screaming in terror; woodcocks peenting; grouse drumming; snipe willowing; and dogs barking all at once – that I felt this team deserved our first annual Owl Award. I asked that others read all participants' submissions so it would not be seen that only I had made the decision; however, when I asked if members had read them, no one at the meeting had. Maybe they trusted me and my decision, or maybe they didn't want to make Lori and Ken feel bad by suggesting another team, or maybe they just never got around to reading them. I have a feeling the latter is the most likely.

Because by May we were into outings, the award could not be presented until September's meeting. Lori and Ken will hold on to the award, a wooden owl

figurine, until next September when it may or may not be presented to another team. Gary feels sure it will be won by him and Connie because they plan to hear moose grunting. Yeah, sure, Gary, but if you do, it could guarantee you and Connie a win. Easy to forget this is an owl survey!!

### **Bird Seed Discount and Membership**

**Cards:** You may recall that at the last indoor meeting in April, Doug Patterson brought up the possibility of members obtaining a discount on bird seed. At the time, we said we would revisit the subject in September and we did. Before the meeting, Doug was in contact with Burrow's and Laporte's and both agreed to a discount as long as we could provide proof of membership. Hence, the



need for a membership card. We all agreed to the purchase of cards for members of Bird Wing and agreed that Gary Sturge would design and order the cards. Cards should be ready for paid members during October's meeting. (The annual membership fee for Bird Wing is only \$5.00 and is to be paid directly to Gary, Treasurer of Bird Wing, as soon as possible. However, remember that you have to also join Nipissing Naturalists Club. Annual fees for 2017 are to be paid directly to Nipissing Naturalists Club by January.)

**Burrows has agreed to a 10% discount on all birding items – seed and feeders. Members have to present their membership card at the cash prior to the sale being rung in.**

**Laporte's is also offering a 10% discount, but only on seed and not on feeders. Again, your membership card must be presented at the cash prior to the sale being rung in.**

**Donation:** In September, Dick gave a talk on backyard birds to the Callander Horticultural Society. Dick was given a cheque for his efforts and he donated the bulk of that money to Bird Wing.

**The Messenger:** *The Messenger* was screened at the Capitol Centre in North Bay on October 2, with Dick and Paul Smylie doing an excellent job on the Q&A panel

that followed the screening. More about this in an article by producer Joanne Jackson in November's forthcoming issue of *The Woodland Observer*.

**Summer Outings and Upcoming Outings:** Attendance at the summer outings with the exception of May's daytime outing to Laurier Woods and August's evening outing to Cache Bay were sparsely attended. So the question was whether we should continue with the summer outings. It seemed most want the outings to continue and will be further discussed at March's or April's meeting. Something for members to think about over the long winter!

In the meantime, there will be the **2<sup>nd</sup> annual owl outing after October's meeting** – more on that later – and **November's gull outing to North Bay's Merrick Landfill site**, the date to be determined at October's meeting. And in December, there is the **Christmas Bird Count**, the date of which is also to be determined at October's meeting. There is no meeting in December.

**Gone Birding:** There was some discussion on parking one's vehicle at the side of the road or in an area where one does not usually park vehicles while birding. Kaye Edmonds made a sign she leaves in her car when she abandons it for birding. See Kaye's photo below. Your sign does not need to be as elaborate, but a piece of paper giving the same information is just not as creative as Kaye's!



**Project FeederWatch:** Project FeederWatch gets underway on **Saturday, November 12**. Seems to me last year's just ended and I have come to realize my seasons are determined by what is happening in the world of birds! Project FeederWatch will run until Friday, April 7, 2017.

For those who have never taken part in Project FeederWatch, please consider doing so. However, first you must become a member of Bird Studies Canada. For more information on becoming a member, how this project works and the rules for entering data, see: <http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pfw/>, and click on **Join Project FeederWatch**. Use this link also if you are already a member and registered for Project FeederWatch and click on **Logon for Registered FeederWatchers**.

Results of last season and previous winter seasons are also available using this link. Click on **Results of Last Season** at the bottom of the page.

**Winter Finch Forecast.** The Winter Finch Forecast by Ron Pittaway is in and it doesn't look good for seeing many winter finches here in the Northeast. In general, Ron states that many birds will have a difficult time finding natural food sources this winter in Southern Ontario and in the Northeast with cone crops average to poor. However, in the far north, the cone crops are bumper to.



*Photo by Renee Levesque*

good. To read more about the state of winter finches see:

<http://www.jeaniron.ca/2016/finchforecast16.htm>.

**National Bird:** The five contestants with the most votes for the honour of being our national bird are: Common Loon; Snowy Owl; Gray Jay; Canada Goose; and Black-capped Chickadee. If the government agrees we should have a national bird and once it decides what the national bird should be, we should know by February of our sesquicentennial year. For more information, you might want to read the article in October's issue of *The Woodland Observer* found at:

<http://www.nipnats.com/newsletters/>.

**In Memory Of:** Special mention was made by Dick of two of our Nipissing birders who died this year, Greg Boxwell and Craig Hurst. For tributes Dick wrote on both these birders, see July's issue of *The Woodland Observer* on Greg, and September's issue on Craig. (<http://www.nipnats.com/newsletters/>) We will miss Greg's knowledge and love of the Snow Buntings and Craig's involvement in the Nocturnal Owl Survey and the Christmas Bird Count. Dick also brought to our attention the death of legendary field ornithologist Alan Wormington. There is a beautiful tribute to him in *The Globe and Mail*, September 22, 2016. See:

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/technology/science/ornithologist-alan-wormington-had-exordinary-gift-for-identifying-birds/article32016865/>.

**Bird Bash:** The next Bird Bash will take place over a consecutive 24-hour period the weekend of **November 5 and 6**. We can expect fewer birds than we have seen over recent months, but that is all the more reason to get out there in the fresh air and look for them!

**Bird Wing Meeting:** Back by popular demand is the Halloween Owl Prowl following a truncated meeting on **Tuesday, October 25, starting at 6:30 p.m.** Location of both to be determined. The library auditorium and board room are taken, but we will not be left out in the cold until we head off to hear or not hear owls. Halloween treats will be available for those who like Halloween treats. And if you want to stay warm, bring a thermos of hot chocolate or stop at the nearest Tim Horton's on your way to hear an owl or owls or no owls. You may recall that last year, we not only heard an owl, but also saw one fly across the full moon.

**Proof, so to speak, is on the next page.**



*Photo by Kaye Edmonds and Renee Levesque*