

Bird Bash Report March 2018

By Dick Tafel, compiler

It was a glorious, sunny, “late winter” weekend during which some 24 participants scoured our district to try to find birds. However, the past several days of below freezing wintry conditions did reduce the productivity – to the lowest in our 15 year consecutive recording history. Almost all of Lake Nipissing and pond waters were still frozen. And so, only 42 species were discovered, much below the average of 52. (Last year's number was 51.)

But, regardless, many birds were especially exciting. As per usual, we will start out with the new ones for the year in roughly taxonomic order - which gets us first to a lone Turkey Vulture observed by Lori Anderson and Ken Gowing in the south end. They also found Trumpeter Swans at a favourite haunt near Restoule, as well as a few nervy Canada Geese. Several others also saw Canada Geese, including Linda Stoner near Bonfield, and Grant and Shirley McKercher who viewed six of them near Callander.

A couple of Common Mergansers were found by Kaye Edmunds near Bonfield. She also saw a Cooper's Hawk near her home in North Bay. Renee Levesque and yours truly discovered a Merlin off Cooks Mills Road. They also came upon a few newly-arrived Herring Gulls on the Mattawa River, the South River and at the Powassan landfill site. Herring Gulls were also discovered by the Anderson duo, who also happened upon a singing Great Horned Owl – on Stillaway Line!!

Only a very few early migrating songbirds had made an arrival – including a couple of Red-winged Blackbirds which reached the home areas of Gary and Luanne Chowns, Ernie Frayle, Kaye Edmunds and Gary and Connie Sturge.

But how about birds that had already made a presence at a Bird Bash this year? Naturally lots of Mallards were noticed by many. The only other duck previously found was the Common Goldeneye seen by Kaye at Bonfield, by the Anderson pair, and by the Levesque duo in small numbers on the Ottawa River. The latter pair also saw a Red-tailed Hawk at the Powassan landfill site. Bald Eagles were fairly ubiquitous once again and observed by Ernie, Kaye, the McKerchers, the Anderson duo, and the Levesque pair.

Ruffed Grouse were spotted by many, including Lloyd and Janet Sparks near Wolf Lake. Rock Pigeons were plentiful as usual, but Mourning Doves were spotted by just a few, including the Levesque pair who observed about ten of them hunched down within a neat protective feeding square in Verner.

A Snowy Owl was observed by Kaye near North Bay's Memorial Drive, and by the Anderson pair east of Powassan. But no Barred Owls were noticed or heard during this month's Bird Bash.

Woodpeckers: As usual both the Downy and Hairy were on many lists, but the Pileated far less so. It was seen only by a few, including Mary Young near Corbeil. No Black-backed has been seen upon any Bird Bash this year – yet!

The Gray Jay was noted by the Levesque combo at Cooks Mills Road, while Blue Jays seemed to be all over. American Crows have now returned in very large numbers, spread within the district. Common Ravens are still fairly widespread. And so are Black-capped Chickadees. Both nuthatch species are being seen at many feeders, but a Brown Creeper was discovered by just one group, the Anderson duo.

No thrushes, including robins, were reported. European Starlings were very numerous, especially at the landfill sites. Once again no one spotted any Bohemian Waxwings. But among sparrows, the Chipping, White-throated and Harris's Sparrows were still comfortably ensconced at their local wintertime feeders, while the American Tree, a more common winter visitor, was at Ernie's, at Steve Pitt's, at Ken Gowing's and at John Levesque's feeders. Dark-eyed Juncos were also still present at the Levesque household.

Snow Buntings (just two of them) were spotted by the Levesque duo near South River. A singing, male Northern Cardinal was observed by Chris Sukha near Field, and a single Common Grackle was at the Sturges' and at Ernie's.

Purple Finches were in slightly larger numbers this month - at Linda's, at the Sparks', at Mary's and at several others' feeders. No crossbills were discovered during this Bird Bash period. A few Common Redpolls were observed only by Chris at Field. But Pine Siskins and American Goldfinches seemed to be at every feeder. Evening Grosbeaks were seen at by Ernie, Peter and Pam Handley, Vicki Wunsch (during Donna Demarco's temporary absence), and by Doug Patterson near Mattawa.

House Sparrows were noted only by the Anderson duo and the Sturges.

It was a difficult, though very worthwhile, discovery month. So congrats to all participants. You pulled out a good number of interesting species despite a cold March with its frozen lakes and much snow cover in many areas.

Next month's Bird Bash will be over the weekend of **April 28-29**. Surely there will be a fair number of boreal migrants appearing by then to make our discoveries even more exciting!