

# Bird Bash Report

## April 2020

*By Dick Tafel, Compiler*

A very pleasant weekend for 32 participants to engage in a proper-type undertaking for the odd times we are in - an area bird search. As a result, it was quite successful, with some 86 species of birds being discovered! I say “quite” since the average for the previous 16 years was 96, with last year's total for April being 102. Indeed, this was the lowest total in all of our past April episodes. Maybe the birds had been held back for fear they might interrupt our current, stressful human problems?

Regardless, we had a lovely weekend, and as usual, we begin with birds seen for the first time this year. So in rough taxonomic order that means our iconic Common Loon traditionally comes first! It was enjoyed by the duo of Lori Anderson and Ken Gowing, Angela Martin, Keith Thornborrow, John and Renee Levesque, Grant and Shirley McKercher, Chris Sukha, Lloyd and Janet Sparks, Steve Pitt, Elsa Tafel, yours truly, and the Sturge trio of Gary, Connie, and daughter, Rachel. It sure is great, isn't it, to have it back among us!

Then we come to the Pied-billed Grebe, found only by Chris at Cache Bay amongst hundreds of “other” ducks.

An American Bittern came suddenly into Renee's view while at Laurier Woods. She also enjoyed a Great Blue Heron there, as did yours truly, and seen elsewhere by the Sturge trio, Chris, the McKerchers, Keith, Gary and Luanne Chowns, the Anderson duo, Mary, and the Sparks.

A bevy of Cackling Geese was studied carefully by yours truly, just slightly bigger than adjacent gulls, in a field near Verner Lagoon. Chris had a good view of a number of Tundra Swans flying overhead.

New “puddle ducks” found at a few places, like the lagoons and Cache Bay, included Gadwall, spotted by the Levesques, and yours truly, all three of whom also saw American Wigeon, as did Kaye Edmunds, Chris, and Keith. Northern Shovelers were enjoyed by yours truly, along with Green-winged Teal, the latter species also being noted by the Levesques, Keith, and Chris.

Lesser Scaup, slow-to- arrive diving ducks, were identified by Chris, yours truly, the Anderson duo, the Levesques, and the McKerchers.

Among predators, the Osprey was no doubt especially enjoyed by most viewers, like Therez Violette – atop one of the light standards at the Cache Bay baseball field - the Chowns, Keith (in South River), the Levesques, the McKerchers, Chris, the Sturges, and yours truly. A Sharp-shinned Hawk was spotted by the Sparks and by Renee.

Shorebirds began to arrive, the Greater Yellowlegs being noted by the Levesques and Keith, with the Killdeer by yours truly and the Sturges. Wilson's Snipe was discovered by the Anderson duo, Bill and Carol Fleming, Steve, and Chris.

Now to Owls! A Great Horned Owl was heard by the Anderson duo in Chisholm Township, while they also “observed extensively” a Short-eared Owl in the Powassan area. Chris heard a Northern Saw-whet in the Field area.

Belted Kingfishers were spotted by a few, including the Anderson duo, Angela, the Chowns, Renee, Fred Pinto, the Sturges, the Sparks, and yours truly.

Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, were noted by Chris, the Anderson duo, the Chowns, Renee, the Sturges, the Flemings, Steve, and yours truly. Keith found a Black-backed Woodpecker near his South River neighbourhood. Northern Flickers were found by the McKerchers, Renee, Angela, Keith, Steve, the Sturges, the Chowns, the Anderson duo, Mary Ann Kenrick, Rose McClelland, Therez, yours truly, and Chris.

Now as to the new, more song-birding types, we will start with the swallows. A few Tree Swallows were observed by Buddy Myles, Rose, Steve, the Anderson duo, Chris, yours truly, the Chowns, Keith, Kaye, the Sturges, and Renee. Barn Swallows were seen only by yours truly, Chris, and the Anderson duo.

Winter Wrens were discovered by Angela near Lavigne, Chris near Field, and the Sturges near Powassan. The latter two groups also found the tiny, super-charged Ruby-crowned Kinglet, as did Kaye and the Chowns.

The only observers of the Eastern Bluebird (so far) were the Anderson duo.

As to wood warblers, they are starting to arrive! Chris watched the Yellow-rumped, while Angela had both it and Pine Warblers in view.

Getting to sparrows, Savannah Sparrows were seen by Buddy, the Anderson duo, Chris, the Sturges, and yours truly. Fox Sparrows were noted by the Levesques, Peter and Pam Handley, and Mary Ann. Swamp Sparrows were found only by Fred and Chris. White-throats were discovered by Chris, Angela, Keith, Mary, the Sturges, the Handleys, Mary Ann, and the Levesques.

The Eastern Meadowlark came to the attention only of the Sturges. Rusty Blackbirds were identified solely by Keith. The Brown-headed Cowbird was spotted by Mary Ann, the Anderson duo, Angela, Chris, the Sturges, Buddy, the Chowns, Mary, and the Levesques.

Those many species listed above were the new birds for Nipissing for the last weekend of April!

Now we get to birds previously seen during this year, starting with the Double-crested Cormorant. They are now appearing in fair numbers mostly in the west end and at Cache Bay. They were noted by Chris, Angela, the Levesques, and yours truly.

Turkey Vultures were in fair number and noted by the Anderson duo, Chris, Angela, the Chowns, the Levesques, the McKerchers, the Sturges, Fred, the Sparks, Mary Young, and yours truly.

Canada Geese were widely dispersed, though not in the numbers of last month, most now having headed further north!

Pairs of Trumpeter Swans were seen in the west end by Angela, Chris, Therez, the Levesques, and yours truly.

Most previously-seen ducks were very widespread and now in large numbers! These included Wood Ducks, American Black Ducks (seen actually only by Chris and Keith), Mallards, Ring-necks, Buffleheads, Common Goldeneye, Hooded and Common Mergansers.

Northern Harriers were in fair numbers and seen by Steve, Fred, the Anderson duo, and yours truly. American Kestrels were spotted by Rose, the Levesques, the Anderson duo, Steve, the Flemings, the Sparks, and Chris. Angela saw the Merlin, while Kaye, yours truly, the Sturges, and Chowns saw both of those small predators. Bald Eagles were relatively common, being noted by the Sparks, Kaye, Steve, the McKerchers, Chris, the Sturges, Keith, Elsa and yours truly.

Ruffed Grouse were observed by Renee, Kaye, the Anderson pair, Chris, Angela, the Chowns, the Sparks, the Flemings, the Handleys, Steve, the Sturges, Keith, and yours truly, while the latter three also saw Wild Turkeys.

Some Sandhill Cranes were seen and spotted by yours truly, the Anderson pair, Chris, Rose, and Angela.

American Woodcock, probably again by their "bronx cheer" voice, were recognized by

Kaye, the Anderson pair, Chris, Angela, and Fred.

Now as to gulls, both Ring-billed and Herring were seen in large numbers, but no one noticed the rarer Black-backed.

Of course, the Rock Pigeon seemed to be everywhere, and the Mourning Dove somewhat less so.

Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers were commonplace at most feeder areas and elsewhere. The daring Pileated was rarer, but still one can come upon one almost anywhere.

The Eastern Phoebe was the only “flycatcher” around, and was found by the Anderson pair, Chris, the Sparks, the Chowns, Keith, the McKerchers, Fred, Angela, the Sturges, Mary, and yours truly.

American Crows were all over the place, while Common Ravens somewhat less so.

Blue Jays, Black-capped Chickadees and Red-breasted Nuthatches continued to be quite ubiquitous, but the White-breasted Nuthatch was noticed only by Linda Stoner, Mary and the McKerchers. And just where were the Canada Jays? Brown Creepers were discovered only by Chris.

The tiny Golden-crowned Kinglet was surprisingly abundant (where noted), being spotted by Renee, the Anderson pair, yours truly, Chris, and the Sturges.

Chris and the Sturges also found the Hermit Thrush, as did Kaye and Fred. American Robins were well spread out and seen from Donna Demarco in the east end to Angela in the west end.

European Starlings were also very well spread out.

As to sparrows, the American Tree Sparrow, which was around all winter, was still here in few numbers, and noticed by the Levesques, the Anderson duo, Chris, yours truly, Mary Ann, Keith, and the Chowns. The constantly-singing Song Sparrows were widely noticed, and the Dark-eyed Juncos continued to be widely distributed.

Red-winged Blackbirds had become well-ensconced within their marshy habitats. Common Grackles, which had been seen in small numbers in the previous three months, were now widely dispersed.

Purple Finches were seen by a few - the Handleys, the Sparks, the McKerchers, the Anderson duo, Chris, Mary, and the Sturges.

Pine Siskins and American Goldfinches were very common, seen generally everywhere, that being the case since at least February. Evening Grosbeaks were also noted, but only by a few, like Keith and Mary.

Finally, we have the House Sparrows. They were found solely by the Anderson duo, the Levesques, and Chris.

And so that completes the details of the April Bird Bash for the 50-mile (80.5 km) radius from North Bay. Thanks to all participants! Birding is a grand hobby which can still be enjoyed despite the current restrictions imposed on us as a result of the terrible Covid-19 virus problem. Keep on going! Hopefully the pandemic will have reduced its impact upon us soon, and the birds will have not even noticed it!

Be prepared for the next Bird Bash weekend over **May 30-31**. There should be the highest turnout of bird species of the year by then!

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P.S. I had seriously considered ending my involvements in this area's long-lasting Bird Bashes leading up to this report. But I am tempted to continue for at least a little while longer as long as the birds, and you, continue to cooperate in making it a success. However, if anyone wants to take over, please let me know. It has been an interesting 17 years of existence. Dick.