

Bird Wing Report

August 2024



Seeds and Cones

Our youngest birder makes the news: J r mie Corbeil, 13, is our youngest Bird Wing member, perhaps our youngest ever to make the CBC news! Warren Schlote, CBC Sudbury reporter, was looking for young birders to interview. Denise Desmarais who lives in the Sudbury area made me aware of this and asked if Jeremie would be interested in being interviewed. I emailed J r mie and his dad, Joel, to get permission and once permission was received, Denise got in touch with Warren and the rest, as they say, is history! The article is entitled “More young people flocking to birding as their hobby of choice” and J r mie is by far the youngest birder Warren interviewed. J r mie has some good advice for both new and not so new birders when he said, “It takes a lot of patience to find everything.” Click on the link to see a great photo of J r mie and to read what he and the other “young” birders have to say: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/sudbury/birding-young-people-sudbury-1.7278826>

A great birding experience: Linda Stoner was in the Sudbury area in June and sent me this story about a Black-crowned Night Heron (photo at right), a heron which seemingly enjoyed having its picture taken:

“A friend of mine in Sudbury saw a bird quite far away in a tree and sent me a cell phone photo of it, a photo that was not much more than a little grey and white fuzzy blob. I was obviously not able to identify it from that photo, but because I was going to Sudbury for other reasons, I brought along my camera in hopes that the bird was still where my friend saw it. Fortunately it was – in a swamp area somewhere on the outskirts of Sudbury. We spotted it immediately and I identified it as a Black-crowned Night Heron, a bird I had seen in Mexico but never in Northern Ontario. It flew from its spot where we first saw it, but not far, and began fishing. It then flew onto a tree branch where it preened itself and posed for us. After almost 300 pictures, I decided I surely had enough! I put my camera away and headed back to my car, while our heron friend flew over our heads, seemingly



Linda Stoner

following us. It landed on a tree branch close to my car and faced us, then turned its head to one side, then looked at us again, then turned its head to the other side. At times, it flicked its head, its plume tossing from one side to the other. It was as if it were saying, 'Where are you ladies going? Don't you want to photograph me any longer?' It was a great birding experience!

(You will note the new spelling of Black-crowned Night Heron – no hyphen as of July 2024 between Night and Heron – and thank goodness for that!)

Lifers: Garry Waldram was in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland for a couple of weeks in late July and very interestingly got lifers he would normally see here – Fox Sparrow, Wilson's Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Short-billed Dowitcher, Surf Scoter and Bonaparte's Gull. He also saw the Nelson's Sparrow, which is not often seen here but can be seen on the rare occasion. One nearly became a lifer for me a few years back when Vernon Buckle from Labrador saw one at Powassan Lagoon, but by the time I got to the lagoon, it was not to be found! (I will not say who is responsible for the delay in arriving at the lagoon.)

Closer to home, Kathy Byers' lifer was an Eastern Wood-Pewee she heard on her Birchgrove West property. It is an inconspicuous flycatcher that if we see it without hearing it, we can sometimes mistake it for an Eastern Phoebe. One of the main differences is the pewee has wingbars and the phoebe doesn't. Since that first sighting, Kathy has seen others.

One of my favourite birds, the Red-necked Phalarope, a species whose population is in huge decline, got added to Sue Gratton's life list this month when she and others saw a juvenile one at Powassan Lagoon. Note from the photo below that Jean Iron sent me that it has blackish upperparts with buffy stripes and a black ear patch. Jean also sent me a research article and a



diagram that illustrates what amazingly long distant migrants the Red-necked Phalaropes are. For example, the UK phalaropes migrate across the Atlantic to winter in the Pacific off Peru.

A lifer for Pat Stack and Linda Stoner was the Olive-Sided Flycatcher, the 2024 Avian Ambassador for Birds Canada, used to highlight the fastest declining birds in Canada, the aerial insectivore. **Pat's picture of this flycatcher graces the cover of this month's Bird Wing Report.**

Summer Trips: Many of the sea birds that Garry Waldram saw in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland are ones he had seen before when he was stationed in Nova Scotia while in the Navy. But this trip allowed him to get photos of some of those seabirds – Northern Gannets (photo of a pair with their chick at right), Common Murres, Razorbills, Atlantic Puffins and Black-legged Kittiwakes.

Garry also saw lots of Boreal Chickadees while in Newfoundland and was able to get some good photos of them.

If you go to Newfoundland, Garry recommends a boat trip to Witless Bay Ecological Reserve. This Reserve is made up of four islands, Gull, Green, Great, and Pee Pee, all “teeming with bird life during the seabird breeding season.” See <https://www.gov.nl.ca/ecc/natural-areas/wer/r-wbe/> for more information.

And as you travel through New Brunswick, Garry recommends a day at Sackville Waterfowl Park in Sackville, a 55-acre waterfowl park and winner of Environment Canada’s National Award for Environmental Achievement. Home to about 160 species of birds and over 175 species of plants, “the wetland is a traditional waterfowl staging area and migration stop for Black Ducks, Green-winged Teal, Blue-winged Teal, Wood Ducks and Ring-necked Ducks among other species. The birds feed on the wild rice stands.” See https://sackville.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/SWP_08_english.pdf for information on trails, boardwalks, species and plants.

Hilliardton Marsh: On the way home from his Eastern trip, Garry stopped off at Hilliardton Marsh, near Haileybury, just as he did last year, to see some bird banding and to walk the marsh where he saw a couple of fluffy black Virginia Rail chicks (photo at right).

During August, there is bird banding from 8:00 am to 11:00 am for a fee of \$10.00 a person. You can, of course, walk around the marsh for free. I wrote about



Garry Waldram



Garry Waldram

Hilliardton Marsh in August's 2023 Bird Wing Report, page 8, posted on Nipissing Naturalists Club's website under Bird Wing. However, by the time this August's report comes out, August will be over and drop-by visits for bird banding are not encouraged after this month. However, you can still walk the trail around the marsh. For more details, see <https://thehilliardtonmarsh.com/>.

Don't feed the pigeons: Recently, there was an article in the paper reiterating that we cannot feed pigeons (one below) in North Bay. A by-law came into effect about this a couple of years ago, so perhaps this recent article was reminding the public about it because there had been complaints. My understanding is that if someone complains, there is a warning, followed by a fine if the feeding continues.



Renee Levesque

I emailed Ron Melnyk, By-law Enforcement Supervisor, about the by-law because although I don't feed pigeons per se, I do feed other birds during the winter and pigeons may show up as they have at times during the last couple of winters.

Ron emailed me back to say, "Pigeon feeding is not allowed in North Bay. **This includes feeding other birds that attracts pigeons.** There are ways to feed other birds while avoiding pigeons, but it is difficult as they are very persistent and will watch for any chance of food when other birds are being fed.

"There are feeders that pigeons can't land on and grates for below the feeders to prevent the pigeons from getting at the fallen seeds. How effective these would be would depend on the location and how often the site is cleaned, but when a complaint is received, we attend and determine **if pigeons are being attracted** or fed and go from there."

Redpolls: So now we have it officially! The American Ornithological Society (AOS) reports that all three species of redpolls, two of which are in our area, the Common (at right) and the Hoary are now one species! (The European Lesser Redpoll is also included in the lumping of the redpolls.)



Stephen O'Donnell

The AOS's Committee on Classification and Nomenclature of North and Middle American Birds reports that "genetic work has shown that redpolls are almost completely undifferentiated except for a single chromosomal inversion that does not prevent interbreeding."

If you want to read about all the revisions including re-lumping, splitting, new genus, change of genus, change of sequence (plovers and herons), and hyphen removal, etc. that have been made as of July 2024, see <https://www.aba.org/aos-supplement-2024/>.

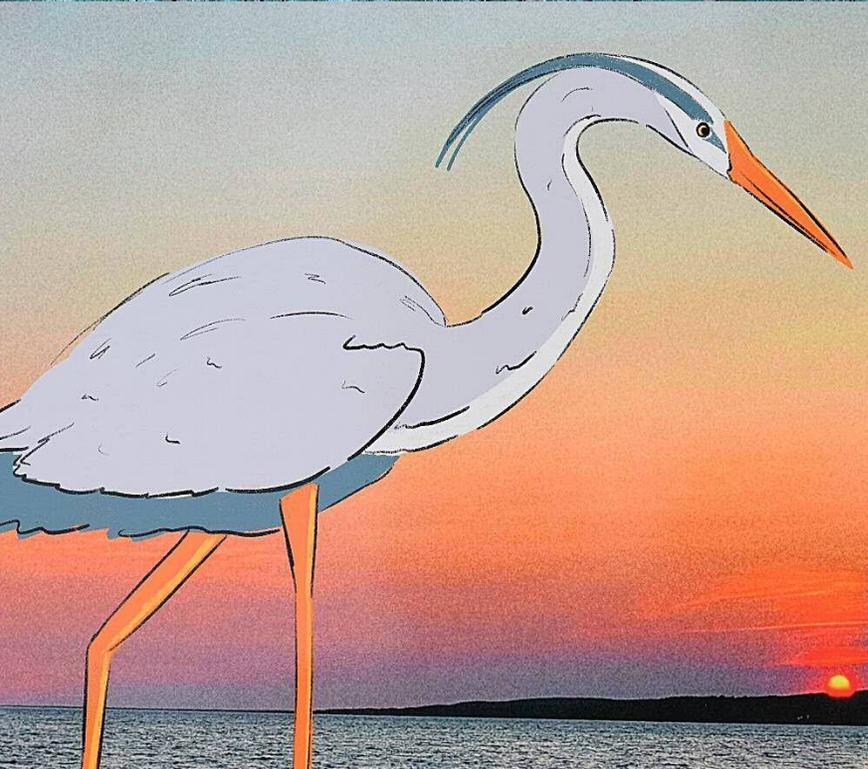
Honduras: A January birding trip to Honduras has been arranged by Fred Pinto and Sue Gratton who was there last November and subsequently did a presentation of her trip at March's Bird Wing Zoom meeting. Bird Wing members going on this trip, in addition to Sue and Fred, are Lori Anderson, Katharine MacLeod, Grant McKercher and Kim Stahl, as well as Nipissing Naturalists Club member Catherine Mills. If you missed Sue's presentation – and even if you didn't – you can read the article she wrote about her trip in this report. We look forward to hearing about the trip from all members at February's Bird Wing meeting.

Humour: Steve Pitt, always the humourist, sent me a great cartoon (at left) by Hilary B. Price. This is squirrel attitude at its best!

Outdoor Bird Art: As you drive around our birding area, you might notice many examples of bird art. Check out the following page of a collage of board art I put together and see if you can tell where they are located.

- Renee Levesque





Bird Wing Outing

By Renee Levesque



Yellow-rumped Warbler, Renee Levesque

Our August Bird Wing outing was changed to Tuesday morning from Tuesday evening on August 27 because of a predicted rainstorm for the late afternoon and into the evening.

Normally August is reserved for Cache Bay, but we went to Cache Bay during July's outing, so we decided we should try some place to which we don't normally go, especially as it was a daytime outing. Most of the time, the only occasion I walk along the Johnson Road trail is during our Christmas Bird Count. I have walked it a couple of times in the spring to find the Canada Warbler that nests near the creek, but it's such a mosquito-infested trail in the spring that I'm reluctant to walk it then. So August is a great opportunity to explore the trail that goes as far as Turtle Lake. (At least I believe that is the lake.)

Although the rain held off for our morning outing, it was still a muggy morning, but that did not affect the number of species we saw, warblers in particular. On the way to Johnson Road, we were greeted by a Common Raven and on our way home by a Broad-winged Hawk.

As we drove down Johnson Road, we saw a few birds. Thank goodness, I said to myself, as I didn't expect to find any on the trail. They weren't what one would call exciting birds, but they were birds and really, all birds should provide an element of excitement: Northern Flickers, Blue Jays, American Robins, American Crows, 22 European Starlings, a Black-capped Chickadee (photo at right), 80 Canada Geese and an Eastern Phoebe.

The trail had more hills than I remembered, not steep hills, but enough hills that when it is as humid as it was that morning, all hills seemed like Everest, at least to me because I can't handle humidity. For the first km or so, there was nothing, not a sound, not a movement, anywhere. Then we saw some chickadees flitting from tree to tree in a sort of opening and with glee shouted,



Renee Levesque

“Hey, some birds!” Then came warbler after warbler. They stayed in that one area for a good 15 minutes, helping us out with identification by staying put within that area, although not staying put on any branch or tree for long.

The highlight for Dick Tafel was a Wilson's Warbler (photo at left), a warbler he saw for the first time this year.

Other warblers included a Common Yellow-throat, a couple of Yellow-rumped



Greg Lavaty, BirdWeb

Warblers (photo at heading), a Black-throated Green, a couple of Black and White Warblers (photo below) (one an immature), a couple of American Redstarts, a Pine Warbler and a Tennessee Warbler.



Renee Levesque



Renee Levesque

Another highlight, because we last saw one passing through in the spring, was a Blackpoll Warbler (photo at left) in its fall plumage.

There were maybe 3 or 4 other warblers we couldn't positively identify that were either the same species as mentioned above or different species – possibly an Orange-crowned and an immature Black-throated Blue. It was just too difficult to get our binoculars on all the warblers in such a large foraging group, many high in the canopy.

In addition to the warblers, in the same general area were calling Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches, a drumming Downy Woodpecker and a

Least Flycatcher that at least stayed put for a bit longer than the warblers.

Then, there was silence as they all moved on!

Along a side trail that led to a small marsh lake, there was a Swamp Sparrow (photo below), the only sparrow we saw on our outing, and a possible Hooded Merganser.



Stephen O'Donnell

I think that spring and summer outings should not be held immediately after a Bird Bash and to that end, Dick will provide me with the dates of the Bird Bashes for next spring and summer and we will then schedule Bird Wing outings accordingly. Both outings probably shouldn't be that close together, separated this month by only a couple of days.

Still, it proved to be a fruitful outing and it is a lot of fun trying to identify all the warblers that come through in a group even if it can be frustrating and hard on the neck with so many high in the canopy.

In search of a motmot

By Sue Gratton

As I trudged this past spring through a cold April rain with my pup, I was reminded of a tropical dream. Lush rainforest, warm sunshine, iridescent hummingbirds buzzing every which way among the heliconia, and the steady rush of a waterfall pouring into the swimming hole in the background. I am sitting in a camp chair, sipping coffee, and watching the banks of the waterfall for the resident motmots which nest within. This was one of those tiny, perfect moments during my trip to Las Cascadas Lodge in the Honduran jungle last November.

Motmots are “target” birds in this region of Honduras, and they became the theme of my trip. I was the only birder in a group of six friends travelling together, yet I was the only person in the group NOT to see a motmot – that is until the last day. But that is giving away the end of the story, so I will back up to the beginning.

Las Cascadas Lodge is a small ecolodge owned by my friends, Deb and Jim. It is located within the Cangrejal River Valley just outside La Ceiba along the northern Caribbean coast of Honduras. The property is spectacular – 100 acres of tropical rainforest nestled between the Nombre de Dios and Pico Bonito mountain ranges. It lies along the river and borders on Pico Bonito National Park, identified as the most biodiverse area of Honduras. It boasts gardens, a small pool, a hot tub, trails winding through the forest and four waterfalls! (Las Cascadas means “the waterfalls” in Spanish.) The lodge itself is a cluster of small, thatched-roof buildings designed to blend into the forest.

Compared to Costa Rica, Honduras is relatively untapped for ecotourism. But it is a paradise for neotropical birds with 778 bird species on eBird. Just on the grounds of Las Cascadas Lodge, 220 bird species have been recorded. Some may have read that travel to Honduras is risky, but this is limited to a couple of isolated areas. La Ceiba and the Cangrejal River Valley are perfectly safe with the same precautions you would take in any third world country. And Las Cascadas Lodge organized everything from the moment we arrived at the airport to our departure. The local people we met were kind and proud to show off their country. I felt completely safe.

We arrived in San Pedro Sula airport and rented a car to drive along the coast to La Ceiba and then up the river valley to Las Cascadas Lodge. This gave us an opportunity to visit Lancetilla Botanical Gardens along the way. It is one of the largest tropical botanical gardens in the world, with 4000 acres of plantings and virgin rainforest. It was first cultivated in 1925 by the Union



James Adams

Fruit Company to test out various strains of banana that could be grown in the Honduran climate. It is now owned by the National University of Forest Sciences and still used for research. It is also one of the top birding destinations in Honduras, with a list of 347 species on eBird and features target birds such as the Golden-hooded Tanager (right), Red-capped Manakin and Red-legged Honeycreeper. Unfortunately, we were just passing through and tired from the trip, so I didn't see any of these beauties. Next time, I will spend at least one full day birding Lantecilla.



Andy Morffew, Wikipedia

Once we arrived at Las Cascadas Lodge, we were immediately surrounded by at least seven species of hummingbirds attracted by feeders in the front garden. My first task was to identify these exquisite, hovering jewels. Back in Toronto, I had accessed the Lodge's eBird hotspot and



Sue Gratton

flagged certain species in my Peterson guide. I spotted the largest species – and my favourite – the vibrant Violet Sabrewing (at left). Slightly less colourful was the most common species, the Rufous-tailed Hummingbird. White-necked Jacobins and Crowned Woodnymphs were also common. Every so often, I would delight in spotting three other species: Purple-crowned Fairies, Long-billed Hermits and Stripe-throated Hermits. All these lifers just on my travel day!

Deb and Jim are developing the lodge as a birding destination. They have planted hundreds of trees and bushes and built platform feeders to attract different bird species. Even without the national park up the road, it is almost one-stop-shopping for birding the area. This was ideal for me because I could go birding by myself anytime without leaving the grounds.

There are three different ecosystems on site. First is the surrounding gardens and lower elevation jungle. Part of this area used to be a cacao plantation and orange orchard, but the jungle has been allowed to grow for many years. This is the area for Keel-billed Toucans, trogons, parakeets and so much more. The second ecosystem is along the Cangrejal River. The river

attracts kingfishers, egrets and a target bird of the area – the Sunbittern (at right). The third ecosystem is high canopy primary rain forest that extends up to 173 meters above sea level. It attracts interior forest species like the motmots.

Some birds live just outside the lodge and I encountered them more or less in the same location each day. These included a Northern Waterthrush, a Summer Tanager, a male Hooded Warbler and a Kentucky Warbler. By the end of the week, birds that would send me over the moon in South River became almost unremarkable. A family of Ivory-billed Woodcreepers also visited the front garden each morning. Woodcreepers are like



James Adams



James Adams

a cross between a woodpecker and a tree creeper. They are reminiscent of our Brown Creepers but double the size with a more prominent curved bill.

Two trails extend up into the primary rainforest and lead to waterfalls with swimming holes. The more sedate Orchard Trail became my regular morning walk. This trail starts in the front garden and meanders through the rainforest in a 30-minute loop. Halfway along the trail is a clearing with a lookout over the river valley and the canopy surrounding it. There is one huge Guanacaste tree in the foreground. It has been colonized by mistletoe and the birds love it. I was able to sit and watch a parade of exotic species travelling through. At any moment, there might be a group of Olive-throated Parakeets, a Masked Tityra, a Black-cheeked Woodpecker and a Squirrel Cuckoo (at left) competing for my attention.

Deb and Jim have developed relationships with several birding experts. My guide, Kelvin Bodden, took me out several times through the week, teaching me what birds to expect in the area and helping me identify the more



Ryan Thims

timid and subtle species like flycatchers and euphonias. Once we entered the rainforest, Kelvin would stop periodically and play the call of the Ferruginous Pygmy Owl (left). Just as some of our northern birds will gather in response to the call of a Barred Owl, Honduran birds are attracted to the Pygmy Owl call. This tiny owl (about 6 inches) is common in the area and hunts during the day. I never did see a Pygmy Owl but heard one on several occasions.

I learned a lot from Kelvin, but the most rewarding experience was being alone in the jungle and discovering spectacular birds by myself. Many tropical birds have such unique plumage that I was able to identify them

confidently with the help of my Peterson guide. For example, one morning I discovered a Green Honeycreeper, unmistakable with its black hood and turquoise plumage. A few minutes later, a Black-headed Trogon sat just above me on a branch. I also saw a Gartered Trogon and a Slaty-tailed Trogon but didn't get such good views of them.

One of these solo walks became a highlight of my trip. I watched two vibrant blue birds with purple breasts fly past, accompanied by a drab brown speckled bird. I turned the corner as they landed on the mistletoe tree. I immediately suspected these might be Lovely Cotingas (at right), a target bird of the region. I was able to get a poor picture that was, nonetheless, good enough to positively identify them. On returning to the Lodge, I learned that this was the first time the Lovely Cotingas had been spotted on the grounds.

Everyone was excited and the manager sent out a social media blast reporting the find. Thankfully I was able to get a picture – otherwise I am pretty sure no one

would have believed me!



James Adams



Ryan Thims

One of my favourite birds of the trip was the Montezuma Oropendola (left), named after the Aztec Emperor. The word oropendola means “gold pendulum” which refers to the bird's bright yellow tail and the male's habit of bobbing forward during its courtship display. The male will sometimes bob so deeply that it does a complete 360 degree turn on its branch! Montezuma Oropendolas are one of the most

sexually dimorphic birds in the world. Males are 20 inches and females 16 inches long, but males are twice as heavy as females. These birds live in colonies in which the females build hanging nests all in the same tree and the males fight until one is established as the alpha male. Once established as such, he then mates with most of the females. I saw these birds most days and when I didn't see them, I heard them. They have a crazy call described as liquid gurgling out of a bottle. It is often accompanied by the male's pendulum trick.

Another highlight was a day trip we took to Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge. This refuge, not accessible by car, is up the coast and consists of an extensive network of mangroves. To get there, we boarded a so-called "train", looking more like a cart, for a thirty-minute ride through cattle farms and coconut plantations. As eight of us piled on top of a cart with our bags, a young man driving a motorized bike pulled up beside us. His friends gave us a mighty push, launching us along the rails as the young man on his bike took off alongside us, with one foot pressed against the side of the cart to maintain our momentum. Without any handholds, we could only hope we wouldn't bounce off onto the side of the tracks!

But the journey didn't detract from the bird life appearing alongside us. Kelvin identified Limpkins, herons, egrets and a group of ibises wading in flooded fields. Once we reached the boat, we motored gently through the mangroves as Kelvin and the boat driver scanned the shoreline. Again and again, we stopped to enjoy the birds, along with the occasional crocodile and Howler Monkey.

We saw 65 bird species in only a few hours. My favourite find was four Boat-billed Herons (right) with their big eyes and outlandish broad, flattened bills. I had noticed them in my Peterson guide, but it was hard to believe these cartoonish characters were real and in front of me. I also loved the Bare-throated Tiger Heron. The vermiculated patterning on its neck is very tiger-like.

Finally, back to the motmots. These remarkable birds, with their long extravagant tails, make nests by burrowing into steep earthen banks. They dig a new burrow each season, apparently digging up to five metres into the bank. There is a lack of research on this species, partly because of the difficulty accessing them.



By the second last day of our trip, everyone had seen one or two motmots - that is, everyone except me! This had become a running joke. The rest of the group had seen a Keel-billed Motmot in town, sitting in plain view on a telephone wire. I had chosen not to go to town because I wanted to spend more time birding. And, of course, I was the one to miss this great motmot. Hearing this, our cook Olvin was determined to remedy the situation.

Early on my last morning, Olvin wielded his machete and led me into Pico Bonito Park to an embankment where motmots are known to nest. For a while, it seemed that we would see every bird BUT a motmot. A flock of Keel-billed Toucans (one at right) flew overhead giving us a great view of their silhouette – all beaks with skinny bodies trailing behind. A drab bird, the Northern Schiffornis, landed right beside me. This was a coup because despite its distinct song, it is not easy to see. And then, just as we were about to give up – because after all Olvin did have to prepare breakfast! – a brilliant blue bird flew right over my head. It was unmistakable with its long tail trailing behind it, and it perched just long enough for me to be certain that it was indeed a Lesson's Motmot. (Photo at heading.) A storybook ending to a magical trip!



Sue Gratton

In all, I saw 108 species and 77 lifers. Now that I am oriented to the area, I can't wait to go back and focus on finding some of the rarer target birds, as well as a few more motmots.