

BIRD WING MEETING

September 22, 2015

The first Bird Wing meeting of the fall got off to an interesting start. Because the library was preparing for its massive fall book sale in our usual meeting place, the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library, and because the Board Room was otherwise occupied, we had to secure a meeting room elsewhere.

The Station restaurant came to our rescue with an upstairs “half room”, but it came with a few snags of which we were not aware until we got there.

First we were told we had to eat, but after consultation with the manager, it was agreed drinks would suffice. Then we discovered we were not allowed to put up the screen for Nicole Richardson's presentation, but properly positioned, Nicole's lap top did the job. Then, there was the **cacophony** (word of the month) as a result of many patrons eating in the other half of the upstairs room. However, we spoke as loudly as we could, and although some of us may have missed a word or two or even a full sentence or two, we more or less got the gist of what Nicole was saying.

We are to be admired for having a successful and fun-filled evening despite all the obstacles we faced. Somehow this must be attributed to the fact that we are birders and if we can search for hours in rain, snow, sleet and hail and in all types of terrain and no matter what wild animal we encounter, then we can easily overcome the obstacles we were faced with the evening of September 22.

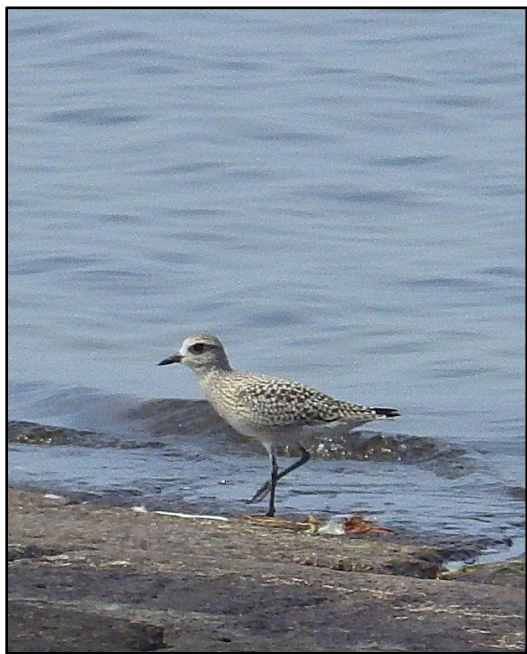
The photo below illustrates the dangers of birding. Renee Levesque was out birding when she came face-to-face with a bear cub. With the mother bear surely nearby, Renee walked away as quickly as she felt safe to do, but she just had to stop and snap this photo of the cub running the other way!



RECENT BIRD SIGHTINGS: The meeting began, as always, with the naming of two birds we saw during the summer and in September. However, because this newsletter was not put on hold over the spring and summer months when we had our outings, all the birds seen will not be mentioned yet again, except for new species seen during September and some interesting highlights from the summer.

One of the rarer birds for our area heard by Nicole, but not seen, was a Boreal Chickadee on one of the college trails.

Shorebirds migrating through, although seemingly not in the numbers reported in other years, included the Black-bellied Plover, spotted by Dick Tafel and Renee at Sunset Park. It was easily viewed on a small rocky outcrop until scared off to the beach by a mink. This bird is also not often seen in our area.



Other plovers seen were the Semipalmated and the Killdeer, and other interesting shorebirds included the Baird's Sandpiper seen at Sunset Park and at the Powassan Lagoon; the delightful little Sanderlings (see below) running along beach areas at the waterfront; Semipalmated Sandpipers; Spotted Sandpipers; Pectoral Sandpipers; Least Sandpipers; and Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, the former even seen at the college pond by Paul Smylie.



Not seen by a member of Bird Wing, but reported on eBird and confirmed by a photo, was a Whimbrel seen along the waterfront.

Although it was noted in September's and October's *The Woodland Observer* and in August's Bird Wing newsletter, it behooves me to mention for the **fourth time**, Fred Pinto's and Marc Buchanan's sighting of the Great Egret at Powassan Lagoon during the August Bird Bash. Such a rare find for this area.

Recently seen warblers included the aptly named Yellow-rumped (below), seen most everywhere this time of the year; the Palm Warbler seen at Sunset Park and near Kinsmen Beach; a male American Redstart seen the day of the meeting in the north part of the City; and a late Northern Waterthrush seen in Laurier Woods. Many other warblers were seen during the September Bird Bash, all of which had been noted and seen during the spring or summer.



Birds that have not been seen since the spring, but seen in September were the American Pipit (below) and the White-crowned Sparrow. White-throated Sparrows were migrating through in large numbers and an early American Tree Sparrow was spotted in amongst the migrating White-crowns and White-throats, as were Savannah Sparrows and recently, a Lincoln's Sparrow.



Canada Geese have been gathering in large numbers, and seen with a flock of 50 or 60 was a lone Snow Goose, first spotted by Therez Violette (below) and later by others in Lake Nipissing off Marleau Road in Sturgeon Falls – another wonderful find.



Photo by Therez Violette

Sandhill Cranes were also starting to mass in September in preparation for their migration south.

Recently, Matt Walter saw an American Bittern in Lake Nosbonsing; Dick, a Northern Cardinal in Pinewood; and Renee, a flock of 10 Eastern Bluebirds in Powassan.

Although many have seen the Red-breasted Nuthatch in recent weeks, there have not been too many sightings of the White-breasted, except by Ray Walter in his yard in Thibeault Terrace and Marc in his Lake Nipissing yard in Ferris.

Flycatchers recently seen include the Least and the Eastern Phoebe. In August, Dick and Renee saw the Olive-sided Flycatcher near Field. They were lured to that region by the sheer number of species Chris Sukha finds during his bird bashes.

American Robins were being spotted in large groups in various parts of the region, although they seemed to prefer Corbeil.

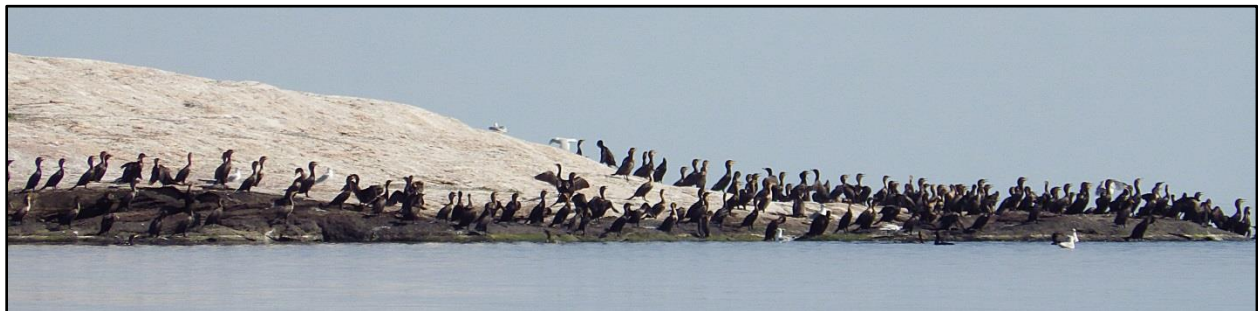
Large flocks of Bonaparte Gulls were seen along Lake Nipissing, mostly at Sunset Park. But many have now left and only a few are being spotted on Lake Nipissing and at the Callander Lagoon. Was there a Little Gull among them? None was reported, but it can be difficult to distinguish the Little Gull from the Bonaparte's, except perhaps in flight and only if one has a discerning eye and determined to see one.



The raptors still present in September were mostly the American Kestrel and the Merlin, but the Red-tailed Hawk (at right) has been seen and a late Broad-winged Hawk was recently spotted. Broad-wings have already migrated south, crossing the border by the thousands. More Red-tails should be seen soon and later on, a return of the northern Rough-legged Hawk.

Ducks seen recently included Hooded Mergansers on various ponds and Common Mergansers, some in rafts, on Lake Nipissing. The odd Common Goldeneye was seen in Lake Nipissing and Wood Ducks were seen in the various lagoons. Curtis Irish's Mallards abound most everywhere.

Common Loons were also gathering in rafts on Lake Nipissing. Cormorants by the thousands can be seen on Lake Nipissing. In fact, any large group of birds in the hundreds to the thousands is quite a spectacular sight to behold, no matter if the species is common.



Lake Nipissing Boat Trip: The day after the Bird Wing meeting, Dick, Marc and Renee took a boat trip from Memquisit Lodge on the West Arm of Lake Nipissing to Sandy Island. The day was perfect, sunny and clear, with the lake so calm for the entire seven-hour trip that it looked like ice. The scenery was unbelievably beautiful and if that wasn't spectacular enough, there were the wondrous sights of rafts of birds: 2,000 or so Double-crested Cormorants (above and top of next page), 200-plus Common Mergansers and 200-plus Common Loons, in addition to numerous Red-necked Grebes, their splendid red necks still showing strongly (see next page). Dick will be writing a fulsome account of this outing for the November *Woodland Observer*.



Species To Look For: Dick informed us of the species for which we should now be on the lookout. These include the three species of scoters on Lake Nipissing – the Black, the White-winged and the Surf Scoters. They are probably best seen from Sunset Park. Also look for the Red-necked and the Horned Grebes in Lake Nipissing, primarily at Jocko Point. The Wilson's and the Red-necked Phalaropes (in breeding plumage below) should also be making an appearance, probably at Warren and/or Verner Lagoons.



Shorebirds yet to be seen are the Ruddy Turnstone (at right), the Dunlin, the White-rumped Sandpiper, as well as more Pectoral and Baird's Sandpipers.

Orange-crowned Warblers have yet to be reported by Bird Wingers this fall and should be migrating through soon. Also, there have not been many reports of the Blackpoll Warbler migrating through, so perhaps we will still see the odd one.

No one has been reporting owls lately. Perhaps the Northern Hawk Owl will return after not being seen last winter, and perhaps the Snowy Owl too, although it was seen frequently the last couple of winters. Through eBird, Renee noted Mike Burrell saw a Snowy Owl recently near

Kingston. And Nicole has banded a few Northern Saw-whet Owls at Hilliardton Marsh (see below). Listen for it here, as well as for the Great Gray Owl.

Other later sightings should include the Redpolls, the Crossbills, the Bohemian Waxwings, and the Northern Shrike. And it has been awhile since anyone reported seeing a Gray Jay.

Louise de Kiriline Lawrence:

In September, Dick met with the Board of Directors of the Nipissing Naturalist Club to secure funding required to go towards the installation of a heritage plaque at Pimisi Bay to honour Louise de Kiriline Lawrence. Once funding was approved, Renee then submitted the application to Heritage Trust just in time for the September 15 deadline. The application consists of a form filled out by Dick; a biography of Louise written by Joanne Zytaruk; an extensive bibliography prepared by Renee, as well as a cover letter outlining the reasons why Louise should be honoured with a plaque. No sooner was this completed when we ran into a last-minute snag. Because Louise's "loghouse nest" she and her husband, Len, built is on Pimisi Bay beside the provincial Pimisi Bay rest stop, it had been



Photo by Fred Pinto

decided the rest stop would be the best place for the plaque. However, even though the rest stop is owned by the province, we had to get, at the very least, tacit approval from the Ministry of Transportation which maintains the rest stop. Dick, with the help of a neighbour, was able to get approval from the Assistant Minister of Transportation.

So now we wait until sometime in January to see if Heritage Trust approves our application, and if so, we hope to have it erected next May or June after the rest stop opens for the season.



From the cover of Lawrence's *The Loghouse Nest*



Corbeil Cultural Days: Matt Walter took first prize for his painting of a Downy Woodpecker (seen at left) during the Corbeil Cultural Days event with its emphasis on the arts, held September 25, 26 and 27. His prize of \$1,000.00 was donated by Lynn Johnston, internationally known cartoonist who recently moved from Corbeil to Vancouver. Matt had a booth in which hung many of his bird paintings, some of which he sold.

Matt is saving up his money to one day travel to New Guinea to see and photograph the "Birds of Paradise". See:

<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/birds/bird-of-paradise/>

In fact, there was hardly a booth in which there was not a painting or a photograph of a bird. November's issue of *The Woodland Observer* will also highlight this event.

Turning up to support Matt were Dick, Fred and Renee, for which Matt expressed his appreciation.

Banding Birds and Surveying High Altitude Birds: Nicole will be submitting an article based on her interesting talk about banding while an intern at Hilliardton Marsh this past spring and late summer, and her job through Bird Studies Canada surveying high altitude birds, particularly the Bicknell's Thrush. Because of her busy schedule, Nicole was not able to get her article to me by "press time", and so it will be featured in the next Bird Wing newsletter.

Crows: In *Canadian Wildlife* magazine, September/October 2015 edition, there is an article on crows entitled "Rulers of Our Roost" emphasizing that crows are not only smart, but cunning, ingenious, opportunistic, resourceful and mischievous – also noisy – all the traits people have. In fact, states the author, Kerry Banks, crows have learned to make cities and the suburbs their own. They like residential parks and lawns and the few tall trees that grow in suburbia, and they like the convenience of trash and discarded junk food found in the cities.

A wildlife biologist, John Marzluff, from the University of Washington in Seattle, is of the opinion that the intelligence of the corvid family, to which the crow belongs and which also includes jays, ravens, and magpies, rivals that of the great apes. In fact, the article came with a quote from Henry Ward Beecher, 1813 to 1887: *If men had wings and bore black feathers, few of them would be clever enough to be crows.*



Many ornithologists suspect that there is more to crow talk – all those various calls and guttural sounds we hear – than we might have thought.

Crows pay close attention to us and what we do and use it to their benefit. They memorize the routes of garbage trucks and feeding times at aquariums and zoos. They can apparently pick out individuals in a crowd and even take cues from our body posture.

Urbanized crows live longer and they need to occupy only 1/10 of the territory they would require in the wild. When woodlands are converted to suburbs, the crow population increases by 300 percent.

The other day, I watched a young boy in the suburbs feeding peanuts to a chipmunk until a squirrel came along and made off with one of the peanuts before the chipmunk got to it. All the

while, a couple of crows sat on the fence watching. When the squirrel took the peanut, one of the crows followed behind it, watched the squirrel bury the peanut and after the squirrel left, dug it up. This happened a few times until the boy was out of peanuts.

Hilliardton Marsh, Owl Banding: On September 26, during a Nipissing Naturalist Club outing, Fred and few others made their way up to Hilliardton Marsh near New Liskeard to see Northern Saw-whet Owls being banded by Bruce Murphy and Nicole. The group was fortunate enough to see two Northern Saw-whets being banded, one of which was Hilliardton's 6,000th owl banded over the 15 years of owl banding at Hilliardton. It was Nicole who brought in the 6,000th owl (photo at right). Perhaps an auspicious beginning for Nicole, Hilliardton's intern bander? (Fred will be writing about the trip for the next edition of *The Woodland Observer*.)



Photo by Fred Pinto

Bird Bash: With the October Bird bash just over, look forward to the next one on the weekend of **November 7 and 8.**

Bird Wing Meeting: The next Bird Wing meeting will definitely take place in the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library on **Tuesday, October 27, starting at 6:30 p.m.** And if anyone is concerned about what will happen when the library has its next massive book sale in the spring, worry not because Dick has already booked the Board Room at the library for those occasions.

Text: Renee Levesque

Photos: Renee Levesque unless otherwise indicated

