

Bird Wing Meeting

January 24, 2017

By Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe; photos as indicated under each photo; hummingbird photos courtesy of Grant McKercher

The first meeting of the New Year was held in the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library and no matter that it is the start of a New Year and no matter what other delights a Bird Wing meeting might bring, we always start with names – our name, first and last unlike Cher, the only first-name star the Chair seems to know, and the names of two birds seen.



Photo by Steve Pitt

Birds Seen in January: We are not seeing many finches this winter with the exception of the American Goldfinch (above) which many are seeing in large flocks. Dick Tafel recently had at least 120 at his feeders. Consider it this year's finch of the winter. Just a few Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins are being spotted here and there.

Dick also saw about 30 White-winged Crossbills near Verner, a nice and unexpected surprise. Although Algonquin Park had many White-winged Crossbills, they have been scarce in our area.

Pine Grosbeaks have been sporadically spotted, but in very small numbers. Gary Sturge saw a couple on Maple Hill Road and Ken Gowing at his place in Chisholm Township. But although Pine Grosbeaks are few and far between, Evening Grosbeaks are being seen by many, especially by Lori Anderson at her feeders in Chisholm Township. On one occasion only, Lori had a leucistic female Evening Grosbeak (right) at her feeder. She also saw banded Evening Grosbeaks at her place – more on that later in this report under the heading **Evening Grosbeaks**.



Photo by Lori Anderson

Connie Sturge saw about 40 Snow Buntings in the Powassan area and Lori gets them daily at her place. She was seeing about 200 daily, but recently the number was down to about 40. I saw about 50 to 60 in West Nipissing along Hwy 64, and about 30 at Verner Lagoon where I also saw three Lapland Longspurs with the Snow Buntings. Not often one gets to bird at Verner Lagoon in the winter, but during the mild January spell that lasted about two weeks, grass and mud were showing on the roadway to the lagoon and the Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs could be seen foraging in these areas. It is a very different look the lagoon has in the winter, especially on a foggy day when I was there.



Photo by Ernie Frayle

The Verner Co-op was also active during January. Chris Sukha saw 10 Horned Larks there (left) and later Dick and I saw two there, pecking away on top of a dirty truck. Chris, Dick and I also saw House Sparrows while birding at the Co-op.

Lori has had a Northern Goshawk in her area all winter and saw one trying to catch a pigeon near her place. And

Gary has had a Cooper's Hawk at his feeder and was lucky enough to have seen it there on one of his Project FeederWatch days. He also saw many Bald Eagles – 11 during January's Bird Bash – around his place in Powassan and at the Powassan and Corbeil landfill sites. Angela Martin reports many are to be seen at the Noelville landfill site and no doubt there are many at North Bay's. If anyone wants to see a Bald Eagle, just go to any of these landfill sites to see one and usually more than one.

Many have seen the handsome Bohemian Waxwings (below), “wearing their berets jauntily and smoking Gauloise” as Iain Wilkes so beautifully described these birds on Ontbirds, and some may even be getting quite tipsy gorging on berries and crab apples.



Photo by Renee Levesque

Ken has had 10 Mourning Doves at his feeder and there are often 11 at a feeder or sitting in a tree on a property on Centennial Crescent. Everyone is seeing Black-capped Chickadees, including Jan Phillips who also believes she had 4 or 5 American Tree Sparrows foraging on the ground at her place. I noticed on eBird that some have been seen in West Ferris and there is also one to be seen in the Centennial Crescent and MacPherson Drive area. However, it seems not as many are being seen as some other winters.

Irene Kasch saw a number of American Crows in town and Curtis Irish saw Common Ravens, numerous along Hwys 17 and 11.

Downy, Hairy and Pileated Woodpeckers have been seen, as have Brown Creepers, Gray Jays and Northern Shrikes. During the Bird Bash, three Gray Jays were seen at the end of Larocque Road and Northern Shrikes seem to be in greater numbers than usual this winter.

Rob Rodger reported many Mallards on his property on Oakwood, and a drive by the water treatment plant on Memorial Drive will yield hundreds of Mallards and a few American Black Ducks (right). Common Goldeneye are being seen on the Ottawa River in Mattawa and at the Amable du Fond.



Photo by Stephen O'Donnell

Uncommon Winter Birds: A few birds we don't normally see here in the winter have made appearances.

Mary Young in Corbeil has had a Red-bellied Woodpecker (below) coming to her feeders all winter. Last winter it was Laura and Gary Chowns who had the Red-bellied coming to their feeders.



Photo by Mary Young

A Red-winged Blackbird was seen in December by Steve Pitt on his Talon Lake property. Steve's last sighting of the Red-wing was on Christmas Day.

Two birders have a continuing Common Grackle coming to their feeders. Therez Violette in Sturgeon Falls has her Pepi and the Doug Pattersons in Mattawan Township have their Gracula. When an unusual bird makes a daily appearance and is the only one of its species, then there is a natural tendency to want to name the bird. Therez's Pepi, which has been coming to her feeder since the fall, did not initially seem to be able to fly, but now flies very short distances, although it continues mostly to hop. Therez reports

one wing seems lower than the other. (As an aside and speaking of grackles, in the non-breeding season, the Common Grackle flies with its tail tightly closed; whereas, during the breeding season, it flies with its tail fanned.)

There's also a continuing female Northern Cardinal coming to her feeder and Kaye Edmonds has had a male, although Kaye has not seen it recently. There was one in Pinewood up until early December, but I'm not sure if it is still around. And I saw mention on eBird of a pair, a male and female, coming to a feeder in West Ferris.

And then there is a Brown-headed Cowbird seen by Brent and Laura Turcotte during the January Bird Bash on a property near Powassan (right). To keep warm, it has developed a relationship with a horse on the property, snuggling down in the horse's blanket when the horse is outside. You can read more about this heart-and bird-warming story in March's issue of *The Woodland Observer*.



Photo by Gary Chowns

Christmas Bird Count: Lori Anderson gave a report on the results of North Bay's 39th annual Christmas Bird Count held on December 17. In short, the 11 feeder watchers and the 17 field observers saw 31 species in total. This number is slightly lower than usual because of the very cold weather that preceded the count, but the number of birds counted, 2,930, was higher than many counts despite the lower number of species seen. This was because of the high number of American Goldfinch, Evening Grosbeaks and European Starlings. The number of Bald Eagles seen, 16, broke the previous record of 10. Feeder watchers came through with a Northern Cardinal, a Red-bellied Woodpecker and a Cooper's Hawk. See Lori's article in February's *The Woodland Observer* <https://www.nipnats.com/newsletters/> for greater detail, along with Martin Parker's article on the Burk's Falls count and Steph Romaniuk's article on the Parry Sound count.

As we have done every year for the last three years, Dick and I hung a couple of ornaments on a pine tree on private property used by a group of Sisters during the summer and onto which we trespass every year to get a better look at Trout Lake. Hanging these ornaments is our way of

saying thank you for “allowing” us to trespass. The three cardinals we clipped onto the pine tree last year weren’t still on the tree, but one of the ornaments from the year before was. This year we hung two vintage dove ornaments (right).

Special mention should go to Gary and Connie Sturge and their daughter, Rachel, and her friend, Nanda, for taking part in two Christmas Bird Counts back-to-back. On December 16, they took part in the Burk’s Falls count and on the 17th in ours. Below is Gary’s account of his back-to-back count days:



Photo by Renee Levesque



Photo by Renee Levesque

The 17th was a stupendous day! First I thought, do we really want to go out in this weather? Nothing is going to move or if it does, only to deeper cover. WRONG! Rachel and Nanda got the Brown Creepers, the Evening Grosbeaks and the Bohemian Waxwings in Callander. Connie and I got the Bald Eagles (left), 16 of them!

And this followed a day after a viciously cold affair down in Sundridge, a day that started out at minus 28 and warmed up only to minus 13. Connie and I turned onto Hwy 124 at 8:15 a.m. and the only thing moving was a Barred Owl which flew across the highway in front of our vehicle. We knew then this was going to be IT! And we were RIGHT! We got a Rough-legged Hawk, a Northern Shrike and a Northern Goshawk and we weren't anywhere near Stillaway Line! (A Bird Wing

on-going joke perpetuated by the Bird Wing Scribe!)

Rachel and Nanda did well after a slow start – had warned them of the slow play rule - but got a Golden-crowned Kinglet, the only one seen on both counts.

These back-to-backers were memorable and it is going to be hard to repeat. I think we now hold a record or two.

Perhaps Gary and Connie might want to consider going for three counts at the next Christmas Bird Count by adding Parry Sound to their repertoire!



Photo by Renee Levesque

Evening Grosbeaks: Last February from the 23rd to the 25th, Kevin Hannah, biologist, Canadian Wildlife Service, was in North Bay banding and taking feather samples of winter finches to assess these irruptive species whose movements are irregular and not always predictable. Winter finches move in flocks to wherever food is available and because our cone crop is poor this winter, we are not seeing many Common Redpolls and Pine Grosbeaks. However, we are seeing a fair number of Evening Grosbeaks (above), one of the three birds Kevin is assessing. Kevin set up his work station on three properties, Lori Anderson's, Mary Young's and Ernie Frayle's. Eventually Kevin will provide us with his assessment results, but in the meantime, he has asked that if anyone sees a Common Redpoll, a Pine Grosbeak or an Evening Grosbeak with a coloured band to note the colour of the band, where the bird was seen and to contact him at kevin.hannah@canada.ca.

Lori contacted Kevin twice in the last couple of months when she saw Evening Grosbeaks in her yard with coloured bands. In December, she saw at her feeder a male Evening Grosbeak with a pair of leg bands, one metal and one gray plastic. She contacted Kevin who informed her that this was the colour he had applied to three male Evening Grosbeaks when he was at her place last February. It may be that this bird was banded elsewhere, although Kevin is of the opinion that it is probably one of the three banded at Lori's last February.

Then in January, Lori and Ken Gowing observed both male and female Evening Grosbeaks with gray bands. A male and a female sighting were at Lori's and a female sighting at Ken's. Again, Lori notified Kevin.

With respect to the number of Evening Grosbeaks being seen in our area this winter, Kevin told Lori that they *"seem to have stayed put longer in your neck of the woods than they have elsewhere in the province. Most sightings have only been one or two individuals for one or two days, though I've no idea how much effort each observer is putting into the re-sighting. Your numbers aren't too surprising since there seems to have been a big incursion of Evening Grosbeaks into central Ontario. Just north of you, in Temiskaming Shores, they are seeing more Evening Grosbeaks this winter than in the past 2 to 3 winters combined, so it does seem to be a bumper crop."*

Kevin had planned to complete his project after last winter, but the numbers this winter have inspired him to keep sampling. He may make another trip to North Bay depending on his schedule and if his budget allows it. At any rate, Kevin will keep us informed of his assessment results, including the results of the stable isotope analysis of the feathers he collected last February. That analysis should be complete by the summer of 2017.



*White Necked Jacobin, Blue Chinned Sapphire, female Black Throated Mango -- all hummingbird
Photos courtesy of Grant McKercher*

Hummingbirds: Hummingbirds, tiny sunlit jewels that dazzle in the light like no other bird on earth, were seen by Bird Wing members in vivid colour during our showing of the PBS Nature Series documentary, *Super Hummingbirds*. There are 338 species of hummingbirds. They are only in the Americas and of those 338 species, only 17 species make it to North America and one

to our area, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Hummingbirds rely on flowers for nectar so it is no wonder most stay put in South America.



Male Tufted Coquette

Hummingbird facts from the documentary: A hummingbird's fill-up of nectar lasts only 20 minutes before it needs a refill; hummingbirds' fringed and forked tongues used to lick up the nectar move almost as fast as their wings; hummingbird wing beats are anywhere from 50 to 200 beats or flaps per minute; hummingbirds can stop or accelerate in a second and can pivot in any direction – to the right, the left, up, down, backwards and even upside down; hummingbirds can hover by flapping their wings in a figure-8 pattern; hummingbirds' feet are used for perching only, not for hopping or walking; hummingbirds have a well-designed respiratory system and an amazing oxygen capacity, with the ability to fly to great heights above sea level; hummingbirds, to conserve energy, go into a torpor at night, similar to hibernation, by slowing down their high metabolism by as much as 90% , their heartbeat from around 1,000 beats per minute to 70 and their temperature from about 107 degrees Fahrenheit to 46 degrees.

Hummingbirds, the tiniest birds in the world, are very aggressive and territorial, not only towards other birds, but among other species of hummingbirds as they battle one another for their nectar. During battles their hearts beat about 1,200 times a minute!

Hummingbirds are like magic in the air and who among us is not delighted by these tiny iridescent birds?

If anyone or any group would like to see this excellent documentary of which the DVD is owned by Bird Wing, please contact Dick Tafel.



Ruby Topaz Hummingbird

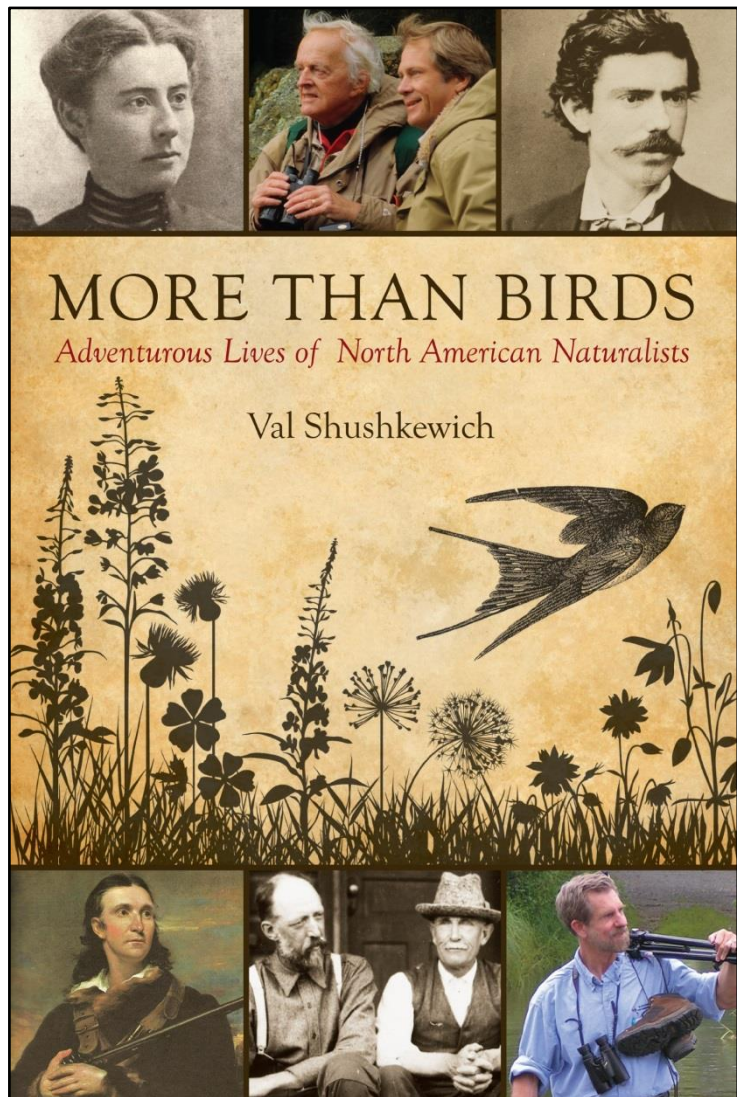
More Than Birds: Dick recently purchased a book entitled *More Than Birds, Adventurous Lives of North American Naturalists* written by Val Shushkewich. In this book of short biographies on 22 naturalists, including John James Audubon, Roger Tory Peterson and Robert Bateman, there is a chapter on Louise de Kiriline Lawrence. Dick is lending the book each month to members of Bird Wing, starting with me as the Bird Wing Scribe. Because Val wrote the book in 2012, I thought it would be nice to let her know that Nipissing Naturalists Club was successful in having an Ontario Heritage Trust plaque installed at Pimisi Bay in honour of Louise, and so I emailed Val through her publisher, Dundurn Press.

I received a gracious response from Val who lives in Burnaby, British Columbia. Before responding, Val read many of the newsletter articles, listing her favourite articles and

telling me she plans to read future issues. She also told me that her *“hobby for many years has been observing and learning about birds. I regularly enjoy long walks in nature and keep journals about the birds and other wildlife I see. I have written an unpublished book about experiences in the San Francisco, Seattle, and now, Burnaby, B.C. areas.”*

Val also wrote a book published in 2003 entitled *The Real Winnie – A One-of-a-Kind Bear*, the story of Winnie, a black bear cub, purchased in 1914 in White River, Ontario, by a Canadian soldier and veterinarian and named Winnipeg. It was this very bear that became immortalized by A.A. Milne as Winnie the Pooh.

Project FeederWatch: Although Project FeederWatch began in November, it is not too late to register for this citizen science project in which you count the species of birds seen in your yard



two days each week. However, you first have to become a member of Bird Studies Canada at an annual cost of \$35.00. For more details, visit <http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pfw/index.jsp?targetpg=index>.

Great Backyard Bird Count: The Great Backyard Bird Count is much like Project FeederWatch, but you do **not** have to first become a member of Bird Studies Canada. This citizen science project is **free** and involves counting the birds you see from February 17 to 20. You can count for as little as 15 minutes a day if that is all the time you have and you can count and enter the number of birds you see wherever you happen to be over this Family Day weekend. It doesn't have to be in your backyard. (Perhaps this count needs a new name as its name can be misleading.) Those already using eBird just need to continue doing so during the Great Backyard Bird Count. For more information, visit <http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/gbbc/>.

Bird Bash: The next Bird Bash takes place the same weekend as the Great Backyard Bird Count, only instead of on all four days, only on two of those days, the **18th and 19th of February**.

Bird Wing Meeting: And finally, the next Bird Wing meeting takes place in the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library starting at **6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, February 28**.

Use what talent you possess: the woods would be very silent if no birds sang except those that sang best. – Author Unknown.



Photo by Renee Levesque