

Bird Wing Report

April 25,
2017



Renee Levesque

Text by Renee Levesque; photos as indicated

The last indoor meeting of the season took place in the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library on April 25, 2017. Because April's Bird Bash took place shortly after the meeting and Dick Tafel's Bird Bash report has now been sent to participants, I will not reiterate all the birds seen in April, but focus only on a few.

Uncommon Birds Seen in April: On the day of our meeting in Laurier Woods in the large Tamarack tree not far from the Brule Street entrance, a tree in which you

often find a porcupine sleeping, Kaye Edmonds saw and photographed a Long-eared Owl. It is an owl that is similar to the Great Horned Owl, but it is much smaller and slimmer and its ear tufts are longer and more closely spaced. It is a nocturnal owl that feeds mainly on rodents, shrews and rabbits. It likes to nest in old nests of hawks, crows or squirrels in dense coniferous or deciduous woods. It is by no means a rare bird in our area, but one you do not often see and only the second one seen that I am aware of this year. One was seen earlier in April in South River.

This is the third uncommon owl seen in our area this year. In March, at least five Great



Kaye Edmonds

Gray Owls and one Northern Hawk Owl were seen, both species considered to be scarce in our area, but more easily seen than the Long-eared Owl because the Great Gray will hunt in the day in winter and the Northern Hawk Owl is a day-time hunter. Both are also tamer around people than the Long-eared. It seems it was an irruptive year for the Great Gray and checking on eBird, the last irruptive year seemed to be 2001. However, I and others did see one near my home in March 2014 and some, including Lori Anderson, saw one in 2013. In 2014, many saw the Northern Hawk Owl when it spent the winter on Ouellette Road.

The Nocturnal Owl Survey yielded other owls, namely the Northern Saw-whet and the more common Barred Owl. More on what was seen and heard during the Nocturnal Owl Survey by each of the teams in a separate report once I have received all the entries.

Dick Tafel and Renee Levesque came across a Great Egret (right) on the Osprey Links golf course on April 19. It is rare to find one in our area and to my knowledge the last time one was seen in our area was on August 30, 2015 at Powassan Lagoon, by Marc Buchanan and Fred Pinto. It is a tall, sleek and slender white heron with a largely yellow bill and black legs and feet. When breeding, the lores are greenish and the plumes on its back are long and lacy. It likes marshes, lakes, lagoons, ponds, streams and wooded swamps and those who have been to Florida no doubt have seen many.



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In the late 1800s when plumes in hats were very fashionable, the Great Egret was hunted for its plumes. We can thank those

who worked tirelessly to enact laws that protected egrets and other plume birds from a sure fate.

Arriving Migrants: April saw the arrival of the Hermit Thrush with its haunting song. Take a listen:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0mATRdzZSc>; the long-tailed, yellow-eyed Brown Thrasher (right), a mimic like the catbird and the mockingbird, but with a double repetition of each phrase; the Northern Flicker and the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker; Tree Swallows; the Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets; the Eastern Phoebe; the American Coot; the Belted Kingfisher; the Eastern Bluebird; the Eastern Meadowlark; the Eastern Wood-Pewee; and all the usual ducks, including the less commonly seen Redhead Duck and Northern Pintail. And we cannot forget the Common Loon, another species with a haunting call.



Renee Levesque



Marc Buchanan

The Osprey (left) have returned and all nests that I am aware of in our area, except the man-made ones, have been occupied – the one near Pinewood Park; the one along the Sturgeon River; the one in Cache Bay's ballpark; and the one on Rainville Road near Hwy 64.

Unlike the Osprey which tend to use the same nest from year to year, other species are busy carrying materials to

make their nests or carrying materials to line their cavity nests. In the photo at right, the Black-capped Chickadee is entering its cavity in the stump of a birch tree.

As of our meeting date, only three warblers had been seen – the Pine (below left), the Yellow-rumped (below right) and the Palm.

April could be called sparrow month because many species of sparrows were seen by most birdwatchers. It began with the many American Tree and the few Fox Sparrows and ended with the White-crowned. Other sparrows seen were the Song, the White-throated and the little Chipping Sparrow. And then there were the very many Dark-eyed Juncos, up to 50 in some yards!



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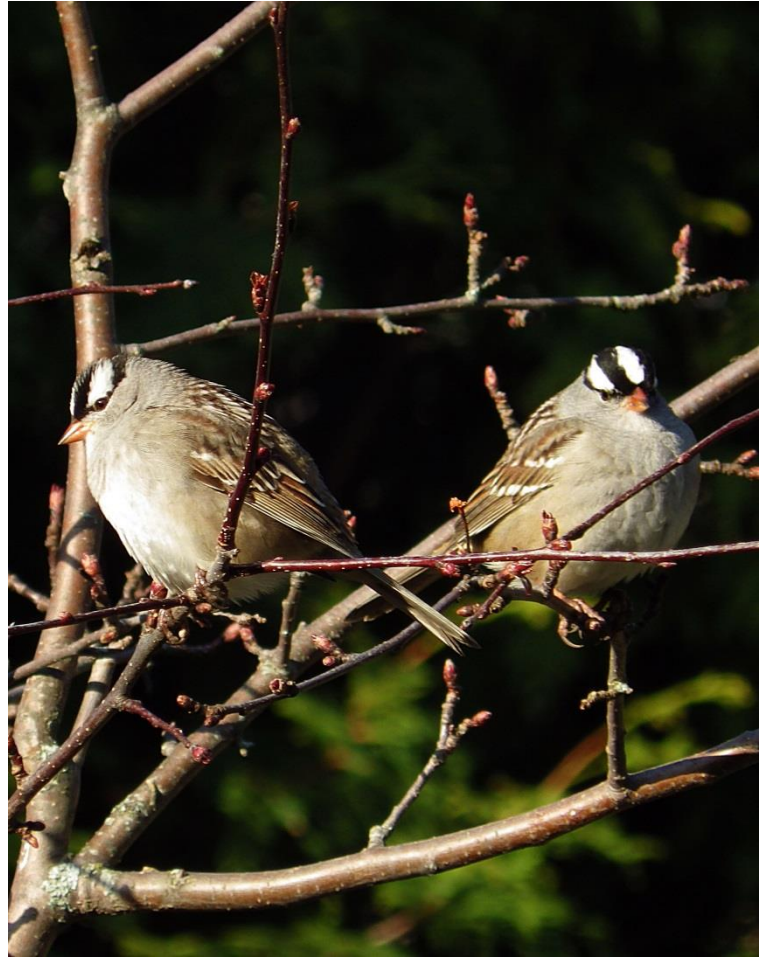
Kevan Cowcill

After kicking among the dead leaves under our shrubs and in our gardens, the Fox Sparrow (top left of next page), a large sparrow, has now made its way further north, while the White-crowned (top right of next page) will increase in number as they too make their way further north. It too is a large sparrow with a boldly striped crown of black and white and



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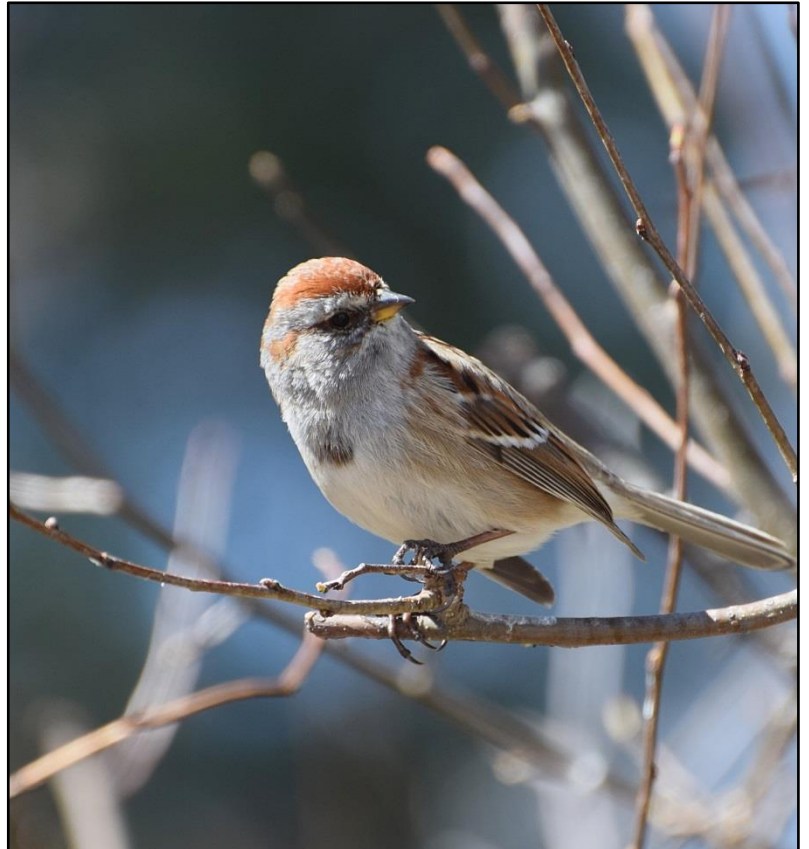
a pink bill. Some find it the loveliest looking of all our sparrows.



Kaye Edmonds (left), Renee Levesque (right)

New birders may have some difficulty telling the American Tree and the Chipping Sparrows apart because both have similar cap colours, although the Chipping Sparrow's cap is much brighter. The main difference is that the American Tree has a stickpin mark on its chest and its bill is dark above and yellow below. The Chipping has a black eye line and a white eyebrow and is smaller than the American Tree by about 2 cm or $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch.

The American Tree seen in large numbers this April is heading north and most have left our area by now to nest in Arctic thickets. Why the word "tree" is in its name is beyond me because as a sparrow it is a ground-loving seed eater.



Chipping Sparrow (left), American Tree Sparrow (right), Renee Levesque

In some parts, the Chipping Sparrow is known as the hair bird because it lines its nest with a lot of hair, more than other sparrows. Horsehair is its first choice and if you live in a horse area, you may see the Chipper taking hair from horses' tails.

Another sparrow that looks similar to the American Tree and the Chipping is the Swamp Sparrow, and subsequent to our meeting, a few have been seen and heard in Laurier Woods. Although it has a rusty cap, it does not have wing bars like the Chipping and the American Tree. As its name implies, it likes cattail and sedge marshes and bogs.

Also since our meeting, some have seen the **Savannah Sparrow**, a grassland

sparrow you will find in open fields, farms, meadows and salt marshes. It can be mistaken for a Song Sparrow, but unlike the Song Sparrow, it has a



Swamp Sparrow (left), Savannah Sparrow (right), Lisa Hackett

yellowish eyebrow, although sometimes this can be difficult to see.

American Woodcock:

After the meeting and despite the rain, three of us did stop at Cedar Heights to listen for the *peent* of the American Woodcock (right). We didn't hear it, although birders have seen and heard it before and since. Gary and Connie Sturge will be doing the American Woodcock Singing Ground Survey this May and the results will appear in the next Bird Wing report.



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Garden Birds: Dick talked about and had a slide presentation of the many birds that those new to birding can expect to see in their garden this spring and summer.

Motus Station: A committee has been formed to look into the feasibility of having a Motus Station installed in our area. On the committee are Marc Buchanan, who gave a brief report, Oriana Pokorny, Dick Tafel and Gary Sturge. Immediate tasks at this stage include researching location, software options and possible funding sources.



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Great Canadian Birdathon: The Birdathon will be held either over one day, May 27, or over two days, the afternoon of May 27 and the morning of May 28. But no matter, there will be a trophy, a signed carving of a shorebird (above) that Ken Gowing will mount onto a trophy base, much as he did with the Nocturnal Owl

Survey Trophy. The Birdathon trophy will be awarded to the team that sees and/or hears the most birds. A point is awarded for each species seen and ½ point for each species heard. Photo below is from the 2015 Birdathon, the year the winning team – and you know who you are – saw the American Avocet at Verner Lagoon!



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Donations raised during the Birdathon go towards bird research and preservation. You can make a donation to Dick or to other Birdathon participants who are collecting donations. See Birdathon, Bird Studies Canada, for a list of Birdathon participants who are requesting donations – on the right side of the page when you open the link below:

<http://birdscanada.kintera.org/faf/home/default.asp?ievent=1169312>. Tax receipts are issued to anyone who donates over \$10.00.

More than Birds: Adventurous Lives of North American Naturalists: Connie Sturge was the April reader of *More than Birds* by Val Shushkewich. Connie

reported that she “found the book very interesting because it was the history of Ornithology in North America. It was ornithologists who founded the Smithsonian Museum and made Point Pelee a National Park.” Connie also “found that there was quite the interaction between the Ornithologists. As mentioned by others, most were artists, so if one didn’t know the name of a bird, he would draw it and send it to one of the others who would then tell him the name of the bird.”

Connie passed the book onto Kaye Edmonds for her sighting of the Long-eared Owl.

Louise de Kiriline Lawrence: Dick followed-up with the Ministry of Transportation about highway signs to indicate where the Louise de Kiriline

Lawrence plaque is located and was told that *“advance and turn-off signs are being made and will be installed this summer.”*

Presents: Because Ken Gowing was kind and generous enough to fashion a remarkable base for the Nocturnal Owl Survey trophy and because he will no doubt do the same for the Birdathon trophy, we gave him an owl (left) that Kaye Edmonds carved from driftwood she collected. Kaye also made a Gone Birding sign that we presented to Dick for leading the group all these years.

Bird Bash: May’s Bird bash takes place over the **weekend of May 27 and 28.**

Bird Wing Outing: May begins the Bird Wing outings which will



Kaye Edmonds

continue until September when once again we convene back at the North Bay Public Library for our monthly indoor meetings.

The first outing will take place in Laurier Woods on **Tuesday, May 23, in the morning, starting at 9:00 a.m.** Meet in the Brule Street parking lot. Warblers will surely have arrived by then; there should be no snow surprises by then; and the rain will surely have stopped!!!

Last May, we broke out of our box and held May's outing in the morning for the very first time. Many were able to attend and so we decided to do the same this May. The highlight of last May's outing, among other highlights, was a great view of the Eastern Wood-Pewee (below).

A bird sitting on a tree is never afraid of the branch breaking because its trust is not in the branch, but in its wings.



Kaye Edmonds