

Bird Wing Report November 2018

By Renee Levesque; photos as indicated

Double-crested Cormorants: Normally I begin the report with birds seen during the month in which the meeting is held, but this time because it resulted in some passionate discussion and because it is important you provide your comments, I will begin with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's proposal to list the Double-crested Cormorant (pictured at right) as a game bird so as to establish an open hunting season on it from March 15 to December 31 across the province. This is being proposed because of concerns from the commercial fishing industry, property owners and some individuals who believe cormorants are detrimental to fishing populations, island forest habitat, other species and aesthetics.



Renee Levesque

The proposal would allow those who hold a small game license to hunt cormorants using a shotgun; **to allow a bag limit of 50 cormorants a day with no possession limit, meaning hunters can kill as many cormorants as they wish over a season;** and to hunt from a boat provided it is stationary.

The Ministry is also considering amending the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act so that hunters, **after shooting the cormorants, can leave their carcasses to spoil.** Allowing bodies of game animals to rot is currently prohibited under the Act.

You can leave a comment on the Environmental Registry of Ontario website, <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/013-4124>, but you must do so **before January 3, 2019.**

Birds Seen in November: Most of the birds seen later in November during this early winter were winter finches – Common Redpolls, Pine Grosbeaks and Evening Grosbeaks. Not seen much, however, were American Goldfinch. Ken Gowing had one at his feeder with Common Redpolls, as did I. Pine Siskins were also not seen in great numbers. I had up to three at my feeder, often with Common Redpolls. Only Gary and Connie Sturge saw crossbills, the White-winged Crossbill (photo at left), about a week prior to the meeting on – where else? – Maple Hill Road.



Stephen O'Donnell

And, of course, most saw our usual winter birds, the Black-capped Chickadee, the Blue Jay and the Common Raven. The Blue Jay, however, did not seem to be seen in the numbers of previous years. Matt Procnier and I had at least 6 at our feeders or in the woods near our homes on a regular basis; Mary Marrs saw some at her place on Lake Talon; and Ken had two unusual ones, one with three legs and, for the third year in a row, one with a curly beak.

Red-breasted Nuthatches were at some feeders and a White-breasted, as usual, was at Marc Buchanan's.

All three woodpeckers were seen by most – the Hairy, the Downy and the Pileated – with the Hairy being the most abundant. Grant McKercher reported seeing a Pileated actually lie on its side on the hopper feeder eating seed! The Pileated is up close and personal in **Kaye Edmond's photo at right.**



The Sturges had many Mourning Doves at their place, as is usual. Ken had about 12, Lori Anderson had one and I had one to three on and off.

Some sparrows were still around. Dick Tafel and Kaye Edmonds recently had a White-throated Sparrow in their yards and I had one in mid-November; Matt and I, a White-crowned Sparrow a couple of weeks before the meeting; and Lori and Gary Sturge each had an American Tree Sparrow. I also had a Dark-eyed Junco.

Grant McKercher saw Snow Buntings, but other than Lori seeing one on the day of the meeting, no one else reported seeing any recently. Lori had about a dozen at her place a couple of weeks prior.

Although Therez Violette saw Bohemian Waxwings in Sturgeon Falls during the recent December Bird Bash, Lori and Ken were the only ones to report seeing these waxwings in November. They saw them on the trail off Champlain Park along the La Vase River, but this was during the early November Bird Bash when many birds were seen, some for the last time this year. Another bird that has not been seen much since early November is the American Robin, but Gary and Connie saw one at their place about a week before our meeting.

Raptors seen were Bald Eagles, up to at least 12 at the North Bay landfill site seen by Dick Tafel, Lori and me; a Rough-legged Hawk, also seen by Dick at the landfill site; and a **Snowy Owl** seen by Therez Violette in West Nipissing on November 13. One was also reported recently on

eBird, seen in the area of Cassells Street and the Bypass. (Visiting the Beer Store again?) Lori may have seen one in Chisholm Township near her place, but may doesn't count as a sighting, although it does indicate that one could be around in Chisholm Township.

For information on a Snowy Owl research project, entitled Project SNOWstorm, see <https://www.projectsnowstorm.org/>.

I had a Northern Shrike in my yard, as did Lori and Rose McClelland. All three were present when redpolls were around. Since the meeting, I had another shrike, this time an immature. It was my first sighting ever of an immature Northern Shrike, brown in colour as opposed to grey. (See photo at right.)

In the world of ducks, Mallards were seen by some, including a dozen which decided to gorge on bird seed on Marc's deck. And Grant had one under his bird feeder. Both Marc and Grant are on Lake Nipissing, and with the lake frozen, the Mallards were in search of food elsewhere.

Other ducks seen were Common Mergansers and Common Goldeneye on Trout Lake now that Lake Nipissing is frozen. Although not seen until December 1, because there will be no report until after late January's meeting, I must mention that during the Bird Bash on December 1, Dick and I saw three Long-tailed Ducks, our first sighting of these lovely ducks this year. Usually we see them at the Government Dock in late November or early December, but the early freeze-up precluded that.

Of note, not seen this fall by most of us were Black, Surf and White-winged Scoters. Paul Smylie saw a lone Black Scoter on the South Bay of Lake Nipissing in early November, but I am not aware of anyone else seeing any.



Renee Levesque



Renee Levesque

Gulls will be dealt with under their own heading, that's how important they are in late November and early December!

Less common birds spotted were a Boreal Chickadee seen on November 1 by new member, Buddy Miles, in Cache Bay. Buddy reports it was high in a tree by the boat houses, working its way towards the main dock area; a Carolina Wren (photo at left) seen by Dick and me at Mary and

Don Mitchell's house on Besserer Road on November 20; and a pair of Northern Cardinals Kaye had at her place in late November. I was envious of Buddy's find because I have never seen a Boreal Chickadee – and how many times have I been to Cache Bay to bird! Too many times to count. I rushed there shortly after I became aware of Buddy's sighting, but to no avail. Buddy did send me a photo, not a great photo and Buddy takes some great photos, but one that clearly shows the little Boreal with its brown head (photo at right).



Gulls: On November 24, we had an outing to North Bay's landfill site. Unfortunately, only three of us were present, Dick, Lori and I. I say unfortunately because it was a sunny and relatively mild day, the mildest day I have ever been to the landfill site in November and December; and there were fewer Herring Gulls than normal – about 100 compared to the usual 500 – allowing us a better view of the Arctic gulls – two first winter Iceland Gulls and about eight Glaucous Gulls, one of which was an adult. There were also about four or five magnificent-looking adult Black-backed Gulls, along with some immatures. But the icing on the cake was the finding of a Slaty-backed Gull! (photo below)

Not that we knew it was a Slaty-backed at the time. We knew it was different, but we didn't know what it was and why would we, none of us having seen a Slaty-backed before. Dick was the first to notice this unusual gull and thought it was a Lesser Black-backed because of its dark

wings and the streaking on its head until he looked down and saw this bird's bright pink legs. Lesser Black-backs have yellow legs. I was able to get a good photo of its face, legs and underparts because it was sitting on the snowy hill right beside Dick's car.



When I got home, I compared my photo to gull photos in my field guides. I knew it was an adult gull in non-breeding plumage, but I couldn't determine the species and did not think it was a Slaty-backed because it would be such a rare bird here and even in Ontario.

So, I posted it on eBird under Great Black-backed Gull thinking that perhaps it was a hybrid and knowing someone would get in touch with me if it wasn't that. And that is exactly what happened. Bruce Di Labio contacted me and eventually the gull was confirmed to be a Slaty-backed. Confirmation was initially difficult because I didn't get a clear photo of the wing tips to show

the row of pearls, an important field mark. I lost the gull at the landfill site after I got its photo and never saw it as clearly again during that visit, but did during two subsequent visits, although on those occasions, the weather was not near as good and the gull was at more of a distance.

Because of its rarity, birders came from the east and south to see the Slaty-backed Gull either at the landfill site or on Trout Lake near the marina where it would come in the late afternoon. I believe the last time the Slaty was seen was on December 4.

From the Audubon website: The Slaty-backed Gull is a “resident along the coastlines of northeastern Asia and a regular summer visitor to western Alaska, usually in small numbers. In winter, it has appeared as a rare stray at widely scattered points in North America, as far east as New England and as far south as Texas.” We can now add as far northeast as North Bay, Ontario.



Renee Levesque

Even if it weren't for the Slaty, we had on that outing some fantastic views of the beautiful Glaucous Gull. (Photo of three of them is above.)

Christmas Bird Count: Lori reported that everything is set, except perhaps the weather, for the Christmas Bird Count to take place **on Saturday, December 15**. There will not be a problem this year for Gary Sturge's group to have access to the East Ferris landfill site. Fred Pinto, in his capacity as president of the Nipissing Naturalists Club, wrote to the mayor of East Ferris requesting permission for access during our Christmas Bird Count. Permission was granted.

It is not too late to contact Lori if you want to be a feeder counter from the comfort of your home provided you are within 15 miles or 24 km of North Bay or take part as a field observer. Lori can be reached at lori.anderson58@hotmail.com.

Project FeederWatch: And speaking of watching birds from the comfort of your home, it is still not too late to become part of that great citizen science project, Project FeederWatch. See <https://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pfw/> for details. And for those who guessed who the

regular Bird Wing member was who had not joined as of our October meeting, I am pleased to tell you he has now joined, “shamed into it” as he told the group.

Squirrel Prevention: Kevan Cowcill sent me a photo (at right) of one of his feeders with a Slinky on the pole to prevent squirrels from climbing it. This was a new idea for me and some others, but many were already aware of this innovative idea. Kevan tells me there are numerous ways to attach the Slinky to the pole – with a C-clamp, a grip-clamp, a screw clamp or a hose clamp or with duct tape, zip-ties or even string. I now have an original metal one and once I stop re-learning how to make it walk and go downstairs, I will put it on the feeder pole – well, come spring when I can get the pole out of the ground.

Stories from the Field: Lori Anderson: Ken and Lori are proving to be great researchers into how much food a Blue Jay eats in a year. Lori reports: *One Sunday at Ken’s feeder, Ken and I counted how many black oil sunflower seeds a Blue Jay devoured at one sitting. The answer? Conservatively, 150 seeds.*



Kevan Cowcill

How did we do this? Ken counted out 150 seeds and then got out his scale and weighed the pile. It weighed 149.7 grains, a unit of measurement equal to 0.065 grams. (See photo below) Amazingly, each seed weighs one grain. There are 7000 grains in a pound. Therefore, it would take about 47 trips for one Blue Jay to eat 7000 grains or 1 lb. of sunflower seeds, or put another way, 4 Blue Jays about 12 trips each - and gone, one whole pound of black oil sunflower seeds - easily achieved in one day. This means that with consistent effort, Blue Jays, at least those at Ken’s place, could cart away a 55-pound bag of black sunflower seeds in 1.5 months.



Ken Gowing

While Ken was busy with all this weighing and math, I watched a Red Squirrel shell and eat 10 seeds in one minute. I did not do the math, but there is more than one Red Squirrel eating at Ken's feeder. Not sure how we will put this information to work, but it was a Sunday morning exercise - for fun.

Steve Pitt: While our researchers were at work, Steve Pitt was busy hanging up

Christmas ornaments on a tree on his property, a tree on which woodpeckers usually hang out to get their daily feed. I don't think the woodpeckers thought these bright colourful ornaments were insects, unless they were large, red exotic insects, but they seemed to think maybe there was something in it for them – perhaps some suet inside them? So over they came to inspect and peck. See one of **Steve's series of photos** of the female Hairy Woodpecker at right. And lest you think it was only the female that was curious, another of Steve's photos he sent me shows the male to be just as curious.



Steve Pitt

Snow Buntings, Champions of the Cold: Lori sent me a copy of *The Snow Bunting Report*, Winter Issue 2018-2019, from the Canadian Snow Bunting Network. One of the articles by Dr. Francois Vezina from the University of Quebec, Rimouski, is about Audrey Le Pogam's and Justine Drolet's research on how buntings cope with winter conditions and temperatures well below -50 C. Results suggest that Snow Buntings "might maintain their cold endurance at winter level throughout summer although temperatures on their breeding grounds can be in the 10 to 25 degree C. range". Results also suggest that "nestlings can be at risk of overheating in full sun at temperatures as low as 16 degrees C."

To get updates on Snow Buntings, see www.facebook.com/SNBUnetwork.

Bird Bash: The first Bird Bash of the New Year takes place over the weekend of **January 19 and 20**.

Bird Wing Meeting: There is no Bird Wing meeting in December because the 4th Tuesday of that month is Christmas Day.

Because Laporte's will be closed for our January Bird Wing meeting, that meeting will be held on **January 22 in the Board Room of North Bay Police Service, 135 Princess Street West, starting at 6:30 p.m.** Grant McKercher will talk about and show pictures of some of the birds he saw during his trip to the North of Scotland in September 2018.

Until then, have yourself a **Veery** little Christmas.



Renee Levesque