

# Bird Wing Report



Nipissing Naturalists Club

## Bird Wing Report January 25, 2020

*Text by Renee Levesque  
Photos as indicated*

When we last met in-person in February 2020 to hear Lisa Hackett's presentation on recording bird songs, we never thought that thereafter we would be meeting by Zoom. Probably most of us then were not even familiar with Zoom. So not only did our recent January meeting mark the first Zoom meeting of the New Year, but also it marked our third year of Zoom meetings.

January's meeting had an unusual technical glitch, one that in its fixing was somewhat humorous. Three times during the course of the meeting, we all heard an echo from whoever was speaking, but we managed somehow to come up with a solution: We all muted at the count of three and then after a few seconds, unmuted. We have become Zoom wizards!

### **Christmas Bird Count:**

The meeting began with my showing a slide show of the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) highlights, with commentary by Lori Anderson, CBC compiler, and Dick Tafel who has kept statistics since we began the CBC in North Bay in 1984.

Some of these highlights are:

A first-ever Belted Kingfisher spotted by April McCrum;

A large flock of 350 to 500 Snow Buntings spotted by Fred Pinto and Marc Buchanan, which turned out to be up there with the all-time high of 370 in 1996;

A Gray Catbird (right) seen by Sarah Wheelan and Rachel Sturge, an unusual sighting for the CBC, but tying the record set in 2020;

Two Northern Cardinals, one seen by Rick Tripp, but far below the hard-to-believe record set in 2003 of 15;



*Sarah Wheelan*

Four American Robins, a nice number for December, but not beating the record of 29 set in 1998;

Two or three Brown Creepers are usually seen during the CBC, but 6 were seen this time, just one over the record of 5 set in 2011;

A Rough-legged Hawk (at right) was seen by Brent and Laura Turcotte, two below the record of 3 set in 2003 and 2014;

Wild Turkeys are relatively new to the count, this year 2 being seen, one by Gary and Connie Sturge and one by a field observer, tying the record set in 2020 ;

A Barred Owl was seen by Grant and Shirley McKercher, 2 below the record of 3 set in 2020;

Four Red Crossbills (below) were also seen by Brent and Laura, a species rarely seen on our CBC, but seen during this CBC for the first time since 2005 when 4 were also seen. The high count since 1984 was in 1984 and 1989 when 6 were seen. (However, in 1950, 17 were seen.)



*Renee Levesque*



*Stephen O'Donnell*

Thirty-six Common Goldeneye were seen in Trout Lake, a fairly high count because the lake was ice-free, but not beating the record of 70 set in 1999; and also because of the open lake, 11 Hooded Mergansers were seen, although this was far below the record of 39 set in 2001.

A Golden Eagle was spotted by Mary Young the day before the CBC, a

species for Count Week. From Mary's very detailed description, it appeared that it was an adult Golden Eagle, one of which was later spotted by a birder on January 1 flying high above Whalley Lake Road East off Hwy. 124.

The total number of species seen was 42, the most seen since 2006 when 42 were also seen. However, 52 species were seen in 1998; 48 in 1999; 43 in 2000; and 59 in 2001, thanks, in part, to the large number of participants, from 800 to 1,000, during those years.

For those who did not already read the articles Dave Dale wrote for *Bay Today* and *Small Town Times* after his interview with Dick and my sending him members' photos of birds seen during the CBC, here is the link to *Small Town Times*: <https://smalltowntimes.ca/2022/01/05/north-bays-41st-consecutive-christmas-bird-count/>. The Bay Today article is identical, but with a different lay-out using the same photos.

An article is also to appear in the East Ferris community magazine, *East Ferris Edition*, this coming spring of the CBC sightings in East Ferris, which is part of the North Bay count. The article sent to Mayor Rochefort was put together by Gary and me. Nice publicity all around of our 43<sup>rd</sup> North Bay Christmas Bird Count.

### **Birds Seen in January:**

At least two birds seen in January are quite rare for our area at this time of the year. The first of these is a little Lapland Longspur that arrived at April's house (photo at right of it sitting in a snow bank fronting O'Brien Street) in early January and continues to come daily to her house for seed. Normally the Lapland Longspur, a high Arctic bird, has left our area by late fall when flocks come through on their migration south and are often seen here at that time in agricultural fields. Sometimes a few are also seen in the fall at Sunset Park. And during the 2004 Christmas Bird Count, one was seen. This past spring, Dick and I were fortunate to see one on its way north at Verner Lagoon in its more spectacular breeding plumage. I believe for me that was the first time I had seen one in breeding plumage.





And then a bird we all look to spot on wires and poles or hovering over agricultural fields come April, an American Kestrel at Lori's farm in Chisholm Township. It arrived sometime in January at her farm where there are plenty of mice to eat. Because we don't see kestrels here in the dead of winter, although some do remain in Southern Ontario, Lori wasn't sure at first if it was a kestrel, or was sure, but couldn't believe her eyes. When she finally got a photo of it (left), it clinched the deal, so to speak.

*Lori Anderson*

Gary Sturge has a White-throated Sparrow in his yard. It has been visiting his yard for the past two months. This sparrow is sometimes seen at feeders during the winter months, but not many, just the odd one here and there, and is often seen during the Christmas Bird Count.

Rick Tripp continues to see the Northern Cardinal at his place in Callander. According to a local resident in Rick's subdivision, it can be seen at 11:00 a.m. daily! All you have to do, Dick, is get there by that time!

Another species we don't often see in the winter is the Golden-crowned Kinglet (right), seen by Sue Gratton. It can sometimes be seen in the winter



*Stephen O'Donnell*

in the more southern tier of our area where Sue saw it. It is often found on the Burk's Falls CBC and sometimes seen on the North Bay counts, more recently in 2008 when 4 were seen.

Kaye Edmonds gets both nuthatches daily at her feeders, the Red-breasted and the White-breasted. Grant also gets a pair of White-breasted Nuthatches at his feeder. Lori and April have seen them in the bush.

Most have seen the Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, but the Pileated did not get a mention, although I know Lori, Dick and Kaye have seen them in their respective areas.

Ruffed Grouse were seen by some, including Linda Stoner and Stephen O'Donnell who gets two coming to his feeder.

Gary has a couple of American Goldfinch coming to his yard, as have others. Kaye gets 5 to 7 and I get anywhere from 2 to 6. But Grant McKercher had a flock of about 30 earlier in January.

Blue Jays abound as they always do, but only Dick and I have seen the Canada Jay which graces the cover of this month's report. I was lucky to get a nice photo of it as it roosted in a tree on Cook's Mill Road. Canada Jays can also be found on Peacock Road, South River, and they used to be seen every year on my road, Larocque Road, but I have not seen them here for a couple of years now.



*Renee Levesque*

Dick and I also saw a flock of Bohemian Waxwings (above) in Pinewood Park subdivision during January's Bird Bash, feeding off berries in one of the many berry-filled trees in that area.

Normally a Rock Pigeon doesn't get a mention because who doesn't see them? But Grant's was special because it was gathering nesting material in late December!

Connie has Mourning Doves at her place. They like the spruce trees on the Sturge property. Kaye occasionally gets them and Lori sees them in her Chisholm Township area.

Connie and Gary have also seen House Sparrows. Gary reports that for some reason every year between December and February, they get House Sparrows at their feeders. Of course, Lori has way too many for her taste on her farm, and during the January Bird Bash, Dick and I encountered about 30 on a horse farm in West Nipissing, making up for none being seen at their usual spot, the Co-op Feed Store in Verner.

I have up to about 20 American Tree Sparrows at my feeders and a couple of Dark-eyed Juncos. Lori, Gary and Grant have also had American Tree Sparrows.

I am also seeing many Evening Grosbeaks (at right) and some Pine Grosbeaks in my yard, and Stephen and Gary/Connie are getting Pine Grosbeaks in their yards.

Raptors seen include the Bald Eagle seen by Linda, Gary, Connie and me, and the Barred Owl seen by April on the Ski Hill Road trails, and by Grant on Cedar Heights Road. (I think Grant is a magnet for the Barred Owls. Seems to me he often sees one on the CBC.)



*Renee Levesque*

Faye Oie recently saw Common Redpolls for the first time.

They are definitely around this year, sometimes in large flocks. Stephen had a Hoary in amongst a flock of 70 or so in his yard. Until there is more evidence that the Hoary is a separate species from the Common Redpoll, it will remain as a separate species. The Common and Hoary are pictured together below and you can see that the Hoary is without the heavy side streaking of the Common Redpoll and looks

“frostier” than the Common Redpoll. The Hoary also has an obvious white rump as shown in the insert photo.

Wild Turkeys seem to be in abundant numbers this year. Faye saw 5 in her area of



*Stephen O'Donnell*

South River and Dick, Lori and I saw them feeding with the cows at the end of Fossmills Road. We were told by someone at the Chisholm Landfill Site that there are sometimes up to 50 there. Dick and I also spotted them at a couple of other spots in Chisholm Township.

Not a raptor but sort of like one is the Northern Shrike seen by Lori, Dick, me and Jim Hasler. Lori reports that the shrike at her place follows the House Sparrows in through the barn windows and at one point had to be rescued by her son.

Many have seen Black-capped Chickadees, European Starlings, American Crows and Common Ravens, the latter two mentioned by Gilles Beleque. There is a loving pair of ravens in my area and I so enjoy seeing them soaring and playing, the most playful of the birds of which I am familiar.

And because two of our members, Rachel Sturge and Sheldon McGregor, live in the south for the most part, but not always, I have to mention the Northern Harrier Rachel saw in a Toronto city park, and the 6 Horned Larks and the Boreal Owl Sheldon saw in his Ancaster area. We will eventually see the Northern Harrier here and the Horned Larks hopefully at some point this winter as they migrate through. And some of us, Gary, Connie and Rachel in particular, will hear the Boreal during their Nocturnal Owl Survey in April.

### **Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas 3:**

Grant McKercher, North Bay's Regional Coordinator for Atlas 3, gave a brief update on Atlas 3, now into its second of its 5-year survey of Ontario breeding birds. During the first year, 138 species of breeding birds were identified within North Bay's 61 10-km squares. There were 186 species identified over the five years of Atlas 2, so we have 4 more years to find the 48 "missing" species – and more! Having more squares and more Point Counts covered will help us achieve that.

Grant reports he has already seen a Rock Pigeon gathering nesting material and Michael Arthurs has heard two Horned Owls calling from the Mclean Lake area. For those taking part in Atlas 3, in addition to observing pigeon behavior, keep your ears/eyes open for Horned Owls (one pictured with its nestling at right) in our area. They are very early nesters, usually in January or February, and so by now have probably established themselves in suitable habitat.





You can also report any crossbills you see, Red and White-winged. They are a nomadic species searching for large cone crops. From the Atlas 3 website: “White-winged Crossbills have been known to breed in every month of the year, but there are generally three discrete nesting periods that are aligned with the availability of seed production in various conifers.

1. July to November as seeds mature on white spruce and tamarack.
2. January and February in areas with large white spruce cone production.
3. March to June when black spruce cones begin to open.

Only November and December are thought of as unusual months for breeding in both species of crossbills due to increased energy requirements needed for molt and unreliable weather conditions, but there is evidence that both species may start establishing territories in Ontario by mid-December.”

If anyone is interested in becoming involved with the North Bay Atlas 3 survey, you can let Grant know by emailing him at [grant.mckercher705@gmail.com](mailto:grant.mckercher705@gmail.com). Perhaps when spring finally arrives and the weather is a lot more conducive, Grant can arrange another training/refreshing session, provided we observe provincial gathering restrictions. Or if it is not feasible to meet in person, a Zoom meeting can be held.

### **Project FeederWatch:**

Many Bird Wing members are taking part in Project FeederWatch through Birds Canada and The Cornell Lab, but for those who haven't yet joined, it is not too late despite the fact it began in November. However, it runs through to the end of April, so please do consider joining. It is a simple survey: You count the birds you see only in your backyard over a two-day period. To join see: <https://www.birdscanada.org/you-can-help/project-feederwatch/>. And for instructions on how to count see: <https://feederwatch.org/about/detailed-instructions/count-your-birds/>.



Steve Pitt

As an aside, a pair of American Robins nested in a small crab apple tree in my yard, a tree no taller than I am because some time ago it got blown down in the wind, but started to grow again

from the roots. I thought the tree a strange choice because it was so small and out in the open. But the pair seemed to manage quite fine and every now and then as I passed by the tree, I glanced in and saw the female sitting on her nest and frequently saw both parents frantically gathering food and flying in and out of the nest feeding the nestlings. Around fledgling time, I was hoping to witness the nestling or nestlings leave the nest, but if they were successfully fledged, they left very, very early in the morning and I missed the departure. I felt a bit cheated that they didn't wait for me to see them leave. After all, for weeks I did not trim the tree or cut the grass around the tree and kept a watchful eye out for any marauders.



*Renee Levesque*

The nest became very noticeable in the winter and I decided when the cold weather arrived, it would make a good little extra feeder. So far, Blue Jays, Black-capped Chickadees, Dark-eyed Juncos, and American Tree Sparrows have used it to get their seed. There is something rather amusing to see them all sit in a robin's nest. Check out the photo above of the American Tree Sparrow getting seed from the nest.



*Kaye Edmonds*

### **Great Backyard Bird Count:**

Every year in February, many of us look forward to the Great Backyard Bird Count, a joint effort of Birds Canada, The Cornell Lab and Audubon. This year it takes place over the four-day period, from **Friday, February 18 to Monday, February 21**. The name is a misnomer because you don't have to count birds that are only in your backyard, but wherever you might happen to be, as long as you watch for birds for at least 15 minutes – and you just have to do so once over the four days if that is all the time you can spare.

If you have not participated in the Great Backyard Bird Count before, or have not participated since before 2013, you will need to set up a free account to enable you to participate in this four-day event. If you are already on eBird, just enter your sightings on eBird as usual.

And because February's Bird Bash takes place over two days of the Great Backyard Bird Count, those who take part in our Bird Bash or vice versa, should have plenty of birds to report.

For more information on how to participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count and to register for a free webinar on bird identification scheduled for **Wednesday, February 16 at 2:00 p.m.**, see: <https://www.birdcount.org/>.

### **Bird Bash:**

As mentioned above, February's Bird Bash takes place over the weekend of **February 19–20**.

### **Bird Wing:**

Our next Bird Wing Zoom meeting takes place on **Tuesday, February 22, starting at 7:00 p.m.**

**Photo of the Month:** Birding is not for the faint of heart as Faye and Sue prove.



*Sue Gratton*