



Bird
Wing
Outing
Report

Bird Wing Report

October 2022

By Renee Levesque

I was not able to attend October's meeting, but thanks to Linda Stoner, Dick Tafel, Lori Anderson and Gary and Connie Sturge, I feel as if I actually was there and hopefully you will too once you read about some of the birds seen this October.

Red-headed Woodpecker: I have to start with a bird rarely seen in our area, the Red-headed Woodpecker, seen by Gail Duncan on Wasi Road and shown at right. What a joy that must have been! To look out your window and see one in your own backyard would excite anyone who birds in our area. I saw one in Florida, but only for a brief couple of minutes and was so disappointed when it flew off and I didn't get its picture.

In the Wasi Road area, one was seen in May 2015 by former Bird Wing member David Rooke. I checked eBird and his was the only recent one reported in our area, although many get reported in Parry Sound and Killbear Provincial Park and area, and, of course, many more in Southern Ontario. I asked Dick if he had seen one in our area during his years of birding. He checked his records and saw one in North Bay in 1997.



Wikimedia Commons

So what makes this woodpecker so outstanding, so striking? Without a doubt, its brilliant large red head, contrasting beautifully with its black and white body. No wonder some call it a flag bird.

The adult male and female look exactly alike and are the same size, so we don't know if Gail's is a male or female. (Only the juvenile has a brown head and a black/brown back.) It is an aggressive woodpecker towards other woodpeckers, even the much bigger Pileated Woodpecker, and any species that approaches its nest tree or tries to raid its food cache. Its predators include snakes, foxes, raccoons, flying squirrels, Cooper's Hawks, Peregrine Falcons and Eastern Screech-Owls.

Interestingly, the Red-headed is a skillful flycatcher, flycatching from exposed perches; but it will eat almost anything, not just insects – nuts, berries, seeds, corn, and sometimes mice, birds' eggs, and occasionally adult birds. Many will visit feeders, as is the case with Gail's woodpecker.

Dead wood for the Red-headed Woodpecker is a necessity for life. Wherever it breeds, its preferred nest is in dead trees or large dead limbs of live trees and in this regard, it faces competition, like the Eastern Bluebird, from European Starlings and other hole-nesters. In addition, dead or dying trees are often removed for firewood or to reduce the hazard of fire.

From All About Birds: “The Red-headed Woodpecker was common to abundant in the nineteenth century, probably because there were more mature forests with nut crops and dead trees. They were so common then that orchard owners and farmers used to pay a bounty for them.” Today, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, Red-headed Woodpeckers have declined by over 1% per year from 1966 to 2019, resulting in a cumulative decline of 54%.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: Some people mistake the Red-bellied Woodpecker for the Red-headed, but when you compare the **cover photo of the Red-bellied photographed by Buddy Myles** and the photo of the Red-headed above, you will note the very obvious differences.

I had a Red-bellied male in my yard daily for about a week, and Steve Pitt had a female at the same time. This is especially coincidental because Steve and I share the same birthday, October 15, the day Hurricane Hazel hit Toronto when we were both living there.

Usually a Red-bellied shows up in our area at least once a year and sometimes even on our Christmas Bird Count. Last October, I saw one at Jocko Point and I, like some others, have had them in my yard from time-to-time.

Northern Cardinal: Although cardinals have become a little bit more common in our area, it is still exciting to see one! Linda Stoner saw one at Sweetman's Gardens in North Bay where one is often spotted; Faye Oie had one in her South River yard much to her delight; Kaye Edmonds recently had a male in her yard in North Bay and it may still be showing up there; and as I write this report, Cal Osborne has one in his North Bay yard. Not sure if Rick Tripp's two cardinals are still hanging around his Callander area.

Owls: Ken Gowing heard the Great Horned Owl from his home and Cindy Lafleur saw a Barred Owl recently in Laurier Woods. She said it "was big, beautiful and very exciting to see. The eyes, wow!"



Stephen O'Donnell

Scoters: Dick Tafel saw the White-winged and the Surf Scoters at Sunset Park, as did I and Grant McKercher and maybe some others. All three of us also saw a few Black Scoters. (female Blacks pictured above) Best to look for scoters at Sunset Park in late October and best if you have a spotting scope and the lake is calm.

They also show up on Lake Bernard in Sundridge. Best also to check your field guide to learn to distinguish one from the other.

Sparrows: The White-crowned Sparrow was seen by Connie Sturge and I am sure by others. Most of the many seen were immatures. Lori Anderson saw the more elusive Lincoln's Sparrow at her place.

American Tree Sparrows recently showed up at my place and elsewhere. Dark-eyed Juncos were in good numbers this October.

The very handsome Fox Sparrow (photo at right) was seen by Kevin Telford. Although I had them in my yard in the spring, I did not get any this fall, although Dick did in his yard.

Lori also has the White-throated Sparrow at her place, as do I, and I am sure others have seen it recently. Also seen this October by some or many were the Song and the Chipping Sparrows.

Finches: Gary Sturge reported two finches, the American Goldfinch and the Purple Finch, both of which have been hanging around my yard too.

Carol Fleming reported Evening Grosbeaks, that large heavy-set finch that looks as if it is part of a motorcycle gang, especially when many descend in one's yard all at once. Faye, Gary and I have also had Evening Grosbeaks in our yard and recently Dick and I saw a flock of about 30, all chattering away with their less than melodic calls.



Renee Levesque

Part of the finch family is the Pine Siskin, seen also by Carol in the south area of Lake Nipissing and by me in my yard in the north part of North Bay. Pine Siskins are usually seen in large flocks, swooping down in a bunch and then taking off in an undulating flight pattern.

The winter finch, the Common Redpoll, was seen by Faye in her yard.

Nuthatches: Gail also has White-breasted Nuthatches in her yard as do some of us. I have seen more White-breasted Nuthatches so far this fall than I usually do. Some of us also have Red-breasted Nuthatches in our yards and some of us are lucky enough to have both species.



Stephen O'Donnell

And although not a nuthatch, I had both the Golden-crowned (pictured above) and the Ruby-crowned Kinglets in my yard this October, as no doubt others had. I also had the Brown Creeper. Earlier in the month, whenever the nuthatches showed up

in the trees at the back of my yard, before I set up the feeders, the kinglets and the creeper were not far behind.

Gulls: Linda saw Great Black-backed Gulls, not sure where, but I saw, as did others, at least 6 at Sunset Park. Grant recently saw a Glaucous Gull with its thick pink bill, pink legs and its grayish or glaucous-coloured body at the marina by King's Wharf. Grant's photo is below. Dick saw a Lesser Black-backed Gull there and I saw a Lesser at Sunset Park. At first I thought it was a Great Black-backed, but then saw it was smaller than a Great Black-backed and its back was not nearly as black. I got out my scope and lo and behold, I saw a Lesser with its yellow legs as opposed to the Greater Black-back's pink legs.



Grant McKercher

Geese: Sue Robinson saw Canada Geese as did most of us, sometimes in the hundreds. But has anyone seen a Snow Goose lately? And I will throw in swans here. Both Trumpeter and Tundra Swans were seen in Lake Nipissing, most of them seen on the lake at the end of Nipissing Street in Sturgeon Falls.

Cranes: And Sue, like some of us, saw Sandhill Cranes. Not sure where Sue saw them, but there were many to be seen in West Nipissing, as is usually the case come fall.

Other Birds: Connie reported Mourning Doves; Kevin, Ruffed Grouse; and Ken, Wild Turkeys. I was surprised Dick did not mention the Gray-checked Thrush, a bird we saw well at a private beach near Sunset. It was lifer for me!

No other ducks, except the scoters, were mentioned of which I am aware, but many others have been seen as you know from the most recent Bird Bash Report. One in particular should get a mention, The Red-breasted Merganser (photo below) seen by Dick and me at King's Wharf; and I should also mention the many Redheads seen in the various lagoons by some of us. I think more were seen this fall than some previous falls.



Stephen O'Donnell

We can't forget the one American Coot seen at one of the lagoons by Dick and me and Grant, quite a contrast to the many seen last fall, and the Common Gallinules seen by Dick and me at Cache Bay.

And then there were the grebes, a favourite of mine. There were almost 20 Pied-billed Grebes at Cache Bay this fall and Horned and Red-necked Grebes were seen at Sunset Park by Dick and me and Grant. Grant also saw some at Callander Bay, as well as a large raft of 29 Common Loons!

Some shorebirds were still around in late October, like the Greater Yellowlegs, but recently Dick and I saw a Pectoral Sandpiper and a White-rumped Sandpiper at Verner Lagoon where, for a change, there was much mud around the northern cell to attract shorebirds. We also spotted, as did Grant, a Solitary Sandpiper. Grant's photo is at right.

Not sure if hawks got a mention, but there have certainly been many Red-tailed Hawks around this month. Eagles have been seen here and there and if you go to the landfill sites, you are bound to see them, many of which are immatures and sometimes mistaken for Golden Eagles. Northern Harriers were still around in late October and seen by some.



Grant McKercher

Birds that Got Away: Three rare species for our area that got away from us or most of us were the Cattle Egret, the Great Egret, and the American White Pelican. Cindy Lafleur saw the Great Egret in Laurier Woods at the Arum Pond, but it escaped those of us who rushed out the next day to find it. There have been other sightings of the Great Egret in our area. Fred Pinto and Marc Buchanan saw it at Powassan Lagoon on August 30, 2015, and Dick and I saw one on Osprey Links on April 19, 2017.

The Cattle Egret was seen recently on Dutrisac Road, but it too escaped the eyes of those who searched for it the day after the reported sighting. Last November, April

McCrum, Stephen O'Donnell, Dan Burton and I saw one just outside our circle limit, near Magnetawan. And in October 2018, one was spotted by Dick, and subsequently seen by some of us, at the Optimist Club Field on Wallace Road. (I believe the next day it made its way down to North Bay's waterfront where more members got a chance to see it.)

And then there was the American White Pelican (pictured at right) that was seen on Lake Tomiko north of Crystal Falls and Wasi Lake, of all places! Again, it was not seen by Bird Wing members despite a trip to Wasi Lake the day after the sighting. Some have seen them every now and again on Lake Nipissing, although I have seen them there only once, at Cache Bay on May 7, 2017.

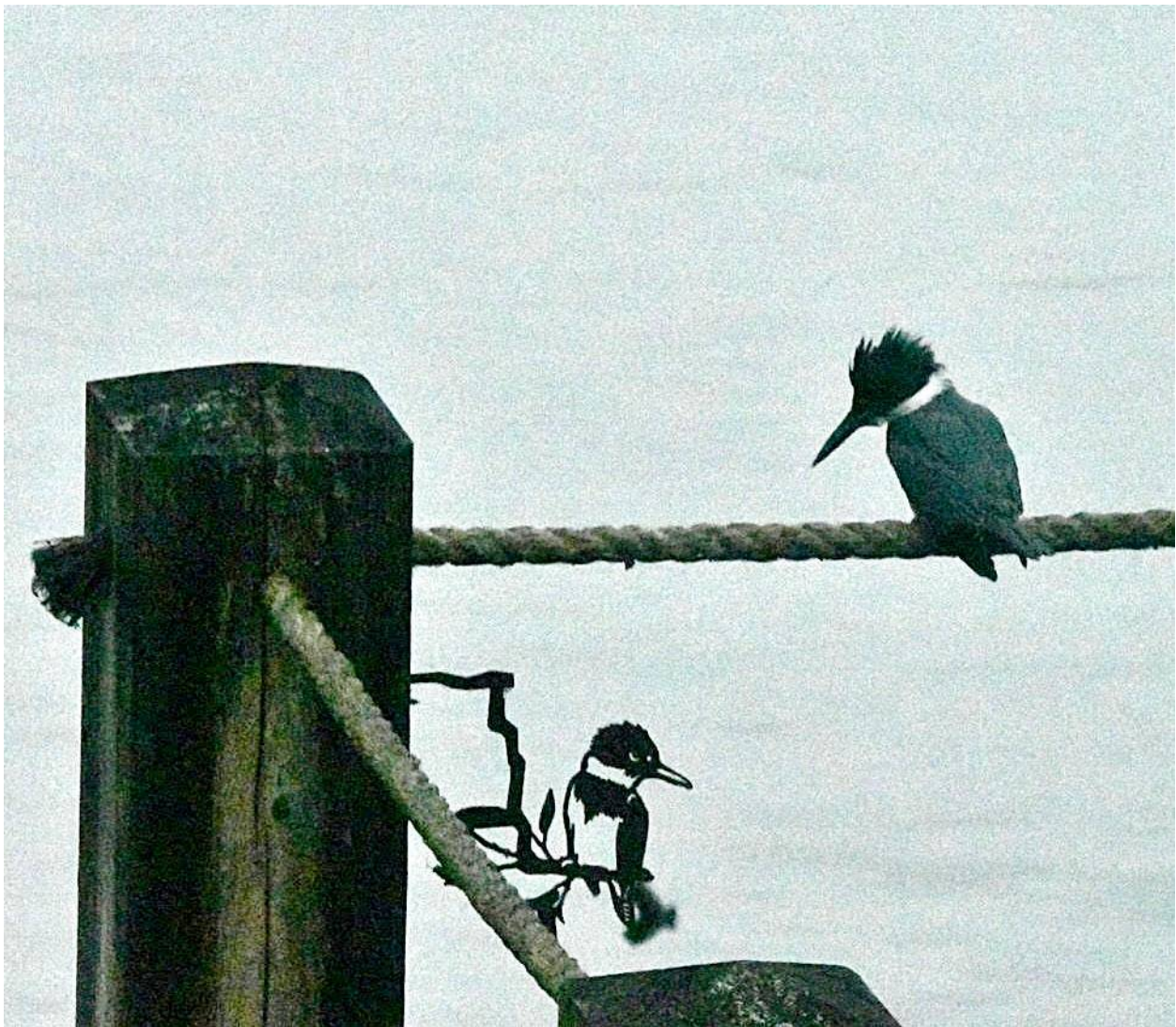
Then there are those birds normally seen, but not seen this year by most of us: the Northern Goshawk, the Whip-poor-will, and the Peregrine Falcon. We will not

see or hear the Whip-poor-will this year, but hopefully some of us will see the Northern Goshawk and the Peregrine Falcon before the year is out. Grant saw the Peregrine once at the Pro-cathedral, its usual winter/spring hang-out. Chris Sukha saw one in Verner during a couple of the Bird Bashes and recently a birder from out-of-town saw one at Verner Lagoon, so we stand a bit of a chance of seeing it before the year is out.



Renee Levesque

Misc.: Grant has a number of bird silhouettes of various species outside his home that he purchased from Metal Bird (metalbird.ca), but he has never had two avian species inspecting them so closely. A third year Bald Eagle landed close by the adult Bald Eagle silhouette, looking up at it hoping by next year it will be a full-grown adult too. The other is of a Belted Kingfisher looking quite curiously down at its silhouette. I don't have room to show both photos Grant took, so I picked the Belted Kingfisher below because it is just so hilarious to see the expression on the real kingfisher's face. (Check out the link provided above in case you might want one or might want to give one as a Christmas present. I know I think I would like one.)



Project FeederWatch. Project FeederWatch, whereby we watch and report on the birds we see in our yard, at our feeders, and on our trees, plants and shrubs, begins

this year on **November 1 and runs through until April 30, 2023**. Your participation in Project FeederWatch tells Birds Canada and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology which species are doing well and which require conservation attention. Some of our members have been contributing to Project FeederWatch for years now, but more members need to join. In addition to providing important information on winter birds, it also makes winter birding a lot more fun! A donation of any amount is required. For more details and instructions, see: <https://www.birdscanada.org/you-can-help/project-feederwatch>.



Renee Levesque

For new birders to Project FeederWatch, there is a free webinar on **November 15, starting at 7:30 p.m.** You can register using the link above.



Renee Levesque

Christmas Bird Count: An exciting birding event in the bird calendar is the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) which has been running continuously since 1900 and in Nipissing for the last 43 years, this year marking the 44th year. It is one of the

world's largest wildlife surveys and the data collected is used daily by conservation biologists and naturalists to assess population trends and distribution of birds.

The CBC runs from December 14 to January 5 and is conducted on a single day during this time frame. **Nipissing birders will be holding their CBC on Saturday, December 17.**

Lori Anderson will once again act as organizer and compiler. Lori needs to know immediately if the regular field surveyors for all areas will be doing their field surveys again this year. She also needs to know who is interested in either helping out with the field surveyors or who wants to be a feeder counter, counting birds from the comfort of your own home provided you are within the required 24 km diameter circle. You can check out the circle on Nipissing Naturalists Club's website at <https://www.nipnats.com/cbc/>. If in doubt, you can ask Lori.

It is best to reach Lori by email at lori.anderson58@hotmail.com.

Meetings: It used to be so simple. We met in person. Now we have choices and members will get to vote on what choice they prefer: in-person only, by Zoom only, by alternating in-person meetings with Zoom meetings, or by what is known as hybrid meetings, a combination of Zoom and in-person. I will be sending a voting email to all members at some point soon.

Readings: I understand Dick read from a couple of articles on male birds living longer than female birds, and last month about the role of male and female phalaropes. Dick is to send me a separate report based on his readings and I will forward his report to members upon my receipt.

With respect to Dick's having a Spruce Grouse land on his head quite a few years ago at Marten River Provincial Park, I re-printed that article, "A Blue Moon Encounter" in *The Woodland Observer* of April 2019. As a result of this article, Bird Wing members presented Dick with a bird hat at our Bird Wing meeting in April 2019. A picture of Dick in this hat can be seen in the April 2019 Bird Wing Report. (More recently, I sent "A Blue Moon Encounter" as a separate attachment with the October 2021 Bird Wing Report.)

This is a good time to remind you that all reports are posted on Nipissing Naturalists Club's website, thanks to Louise Simpson and previously Sarah Wheelan and Keith Pearson. From the Home page <https://www.nipnats.com/>,

click on Bird Wing and from there you will find the headings for Bird Wing Meeting and Outing Reports, Bird Bash Reports, Owl Survey Reports and Bird Wing Book Reviews.

If you did not read Grant's book review of *Woman, Watching*, a biography of Louise de Kiriline Lawrence, by Marilyn Simonds, when it was sent to members earlier this month, it is posted, along with two other book reviews, on Bird Wing Book Reviews. **Read the reviews if you haven't already and then think about writing a book review based on a bird book you recently read. Let me know if you wish to do so.**

Bird Bash: November's Bird Bash takes place over the weekend of **November 5 and 6**. There won't be as many birds as there were since May, so it will help results if we get a good number of participants. I will send a reminder.

Bird Wing Meeting: The next meeting will be held on **Tuesday, November 22, starting at 6:30 p.m. in the Teen Room of the North Bay Public Library**. More information on the meeting format will follow once it is known.

