

Bird Wing Report

September 2023





Important Dates in date order

Bird Bash: Over the weekend of October 8-9. Yes, it is over the Thanksgiving weekend, but a good time to get out with family and friends or by yourself, especially if this current weather holds.

October Global Big Day: Saturday, October 14. Enter all your sightings on eBird for free that day wherever you are watching birds, be it in your backyard or in our districts or even far from home. It is a global event. If you are already using eBird, no need to do anything; if not, for details see: <https://ebird.org/news/october-big-day-2023>. It would be great if most members of Bird Wing participated.

Bird Wing meeting: Tuesday, October 24, starting at 6:30 pm in the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library. I can't imagine the Worthington Street doors will be ready by then, but if they aren't, enter through the McIntyre Street doors and head to the Worthington Street side and down the stairs to the auditorium. Our **guest speaker is Yvonne Montgomery who will talk to us about Common Loons**, specifically about the ones that nest on the platform she made for them by her Trout Lake home.



David Rooke

Project Feeder Watch: Begins on

November 1 and goes through until April 30, 2024. We encourage members to seriously consider taking part in this very worthwhile citizen science project. Winter yard birds help scientists determine the health of the species and which ones need conservation attention. All you have to do is watch birds in your yard for as long or as little as you can on two consecutive days a week. You don't have to have a feeder to watch the birds. Birds also like plants, shrubs, water, bird baths and other birdy features in your yard. To take part, a donation to Birds Canada is required. For more details see: <https://www.birdscanada.org/you-can-help/project-feederwatch>.

Christmas Bird Count (CBC): The North Bay CBC will take place this year on **Saturday, December 16.** We are hoping Lori Anderson, our compiler over the past few years, will once again assume this important duty. More details will follow after October's meeting. I have not yet heard when the Burk's Falls CBC will take place. It is a Christmas Bird Count that goes as far north as Sundridge.

Bird Wing meeting



Stephen O'Donnell

Text: Renee Levesque; photos as indicated

There were only a few of us at the Bird Wing meeting on September 24, although we learned from our treasurer, Angela Mills, that members now number 78! Could be because the meeting was held on a Monday instead of our regular Tuesday; could be that we had to enter through the McIntyre Street entrance and some got lost wandering the hallways and floors of the library; and possibly it was because it is September, a month when numbers are generally low, and this September especially because the weather is so lovely and much above seasonal. Maybe we should consider a September outing instead of a meeting. It is something to think about and discuss at October's meeting.

But despite the low numbers, we made the very best of it, showed much enthusiasm and discussed many topics, including the two birds – and more – we each saw during September.

Birds seen during September: There were at least two birds found most everywhere in September - the American Pipit seen by Kevin Telford and others - in fact, Grant McKercher reported that they practically took over the streets in the Callander area where Grant lives - and the Yellow-rumped Warbler (seen at right) also seen by most in multiple numbers.



Renee Levesque

Another surprisingly large flock was of Pine Skiskins, also known as a charm, trembling or company. Oriana Pokorny saw about 40 on the Nipissing University/Canadore College campus and I had some in my area, near the campus, including at my nyjer feeder – and following the meeting, I heard many on Chapman’s Landing Road, Nipissing Village. It is not a bird we usually see at this time of the year, but the Winter Finch report by Tyler Hoar indicates that “significant numbers of siskins started to leave the boreal forest in mid-September” because of the poor White Spruce crop in much of the forest. This should result in a “moderate to possibly strong flight of siskins southward this fall.”

The Palm Warbler (at right) had arrived as it does most Septembers, although I don’t think there were as many this year as some other years. It is a warbler that was seen by Garry Waldram and a lifer for him. The few other warblers seen in recent days prior to the meeting were the Black-throated Blue seen by Sue Gratton at Mikisew Provincial Park; the Nashville and the Common Yellowthroat seen by some; and the Black-throated Green seen by me. Earlier in September, many more warblers were seen and during September’s Bird Bash, Sue saw a total of 14.



Renee Levesque

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are usually gone from our area by mid-September, always sad to see, although Kevan still had one at his place on September 22, but just for that day. Also gone are the Osprey. I always find it sad when the Cache Bay ballpark Osprey leave. It means summer is definitely over despite our great weather this month. But still at Cache Bay were a pair of Trumpeter Swans, and more will be gathering in Lake Nipissing at the end of Nipissing Street, Sturgeon Falls, as will the Tundra.

No longer are American Robins everywhere, but some are still around, as are other thrushes – the Swainson’s Thrush seen by Angela, Dick and me, and the Hermit Thrush seen by Garry and me.

Grant recently saw a Belted Kingfisher at his place, a bird honoured as Bird of the Year by the American Birding Association. It is the female kingfisher that was named Bird of the Year and became known as the Belted Queenfisher! One was recently seen actively hunting at Cache Bay, a usual occurrence there.

A very active Red-breasted Nuthatch was seen by Angela, one also seen or heard by others. A Winter Wren was seen by Faye Oei in her South River area and by me behind my house, and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet was seen by Sue and me who also saw the Golden-crowned Kinglet. (Following the meeting and as I write this report, a fairly decent flock of both kinglets were in my yard, and Dick, who hadn't had a good look at one since the spring, saw three.)

Dorothy Williams saw a Scarlet Tanager, either a female or fall male, a lifer for her. One was also seen by Faye and by others. The male tanager is in his winter plumage so you won't see his splendid scarlet colouring. Oriana made mention of his splotchy yellow and red colouring seen in late summer as he molts to his yellow-green winter plumage. See Garry's photo at right.



Garry Waldram

One of three woodpeckers mentioned was the Pileated, seen by Kevin and Oriana and others.

Oriana reported there was a family at her mother's house on Tower Drive and the young sounded surprisingly like Ruffed Grouse! Another woodpecker mentioned was the Northern Flicker, and at this time of the year there are a fair number of them around. The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was not mentioned, but I am sure it was seen by some. In fact, two young ones were still coming daily to my yard, as were the Hairy and Downy, two no doubt seen by most.

And then there was the elusive Black-backed Woodpecker I saw in my yard – well, flying low over my yard from the next door neighbour's to the other next door neighbour's and then back again. I believe there was a young one it left behind when it flew over my yard because it starting its "crying" call as soon as its parent left. I was standing on my patio when I heard the Black-back's call and from the many, many, many times I walked up and down the famed Peacock Road playing its call, I recognized it immediately. **Stephen O'Donnell's photo of a Black-backed Woodpecker graces the cover of this month's Bird Wing Report.**

Sandhill Cranes (photo at heading of one in flight) are arriving in large numbers. Steve Pitt saw about 300 on Beaudry Road in West Nipissing and Dick and I saw about 200 there. Always worth getting out to West Nipissing to see the large numbers which I suspect will continue to increase.

Grant was fortunate to see a Cooper's Hawk at his place on the day of the meeting. No one else reported seeing one. But as good as it is to see a Cooper's, Dick topped the charts with his seeing a Peregrine Falcon at Verner Lagoon, a falcon often seen at this lagoon or in the vicinity of Verner. I was with Dick when he saw it and it was a breath of fresh air to finally see one. Not many have been seen so far this year in our area. I believe only Grant saw one this year at its usual winter roost at the Pro-Cathedral. Perhaps it moved on to another church? Oriana saw one in Temagami this summer.

Dick also saw a Spruce Grouse (at right) on the road to Louck Lake. This was his third attempt to find one, and my second. I was not going to make a third, so I'm glad I saw it too. Earlier this month, or perhaps in late August, Sue also saw one on the same road and that encouraged us to try again. Garry also saw one near his place on Pioneer Road in Boulter Township, the first time he has seen one in his immediate area.



Renee Levesque

Sparrows also abound, but I think to a lesser extent than other years. The sparrow of the month is the White-crowned, but also seen were White-throated, Chipping, Song, and Swamp. I saw a nice Lincoln's at my place. I usually see one coming through every spring and fall. And who wouldn't love to see a Field, a Vesper and a Clay-coloured Sparrow? It has been a while since most of us have seen these sparrows. I'm not even sure the Vesper still comes to our area.



Stephen O'Donnell

But before we leave the sparrows, there are a few Dark-eyed Juncos around, seen by some of us, but Steve Pitt recently saw a female Oregon Dark-eyed Junco (left) in his yard, a bird of the west! Sometimes we get them here. I had one in my yard a few years back, as did Stephen. And many of us have seen them on our travels west.

The only flycatcher mentioned as being seen in recent days was the Eastern Phoebe.

Turkey Vultures were still to be seen in the recent days prior to our meeting, although their numbers had diminished.

Bald Eagles were back at the landfill site, seen there by Oriana, and Grant reported that the eagle couple by the Callander dock that had three young had the runt still pestering its parents!

Broad-winged Hawks, despite the very large numbers going through the various hawk watches, were also still around. I saw one a few times recently near my house and saw it again twice after the meeting. American Kestrels are also heading south in large numbers, but Dick and I saw one in West Nipissing a few days ago. We also recently saw three Northern Harriers in West Nipissing, two at Verner Lagoon. No one mentioned the Merlin, although during September's Bird Bash there was one at Sunset Park.

Ducks of every kind were being seen in the various lagoons and Canada Geese abound in fields and at lagoons. But no one has yet reported a Snow Goose!

The one bird Dick has been desperate to find was the American Bittern (photo at right), so you can imagine how he felt when Kevin reported that he and June saw four in Wasi Lake in early September and Oriana saw one in the Cedar Heights area. Maybe Dick made up for not seeing any bitterns by seeing at least eight Pied-billed Grebes in Cache Bay while he was there with me. They were very close to the wrecked "boathouse", so easily seen even without a scope.

And finally shorebirds. The last couple of months have certainly been the time to see returning shorebirds on their long trek back from the Arctic, many off to South America. They can be a challenge, not always easy to identify in their winter plumage, but having a sort of schedule marking their return south does help to some extent. See: <http://www.ofo.ca/site/page/view/articles.southboundshorebirds>.



My second bird after the Black-backed Woodpecker was the Black-bellied Plover (photo at right), one seen at Powassan Lagoon and two seen at Warren Lagoon. Garry saw a Semipalmated Plover, seemingly quite a common plover this September. It was seen by others in various places, but for Garry, it was another lifer. I was fortunate enough to see one Sanderling at Kinsmen Beach in North Bay. My feeling about the beautiful little



Grant McKercher

Sanderling – when it comes through, better get out to whatever beach it decides to run along and see it right away because it doesn't stay long.

Pectoral Sandpipers also made themselves known at Powassan and Warren Lagoons. And one of my favourites, the Baird's Sandpiper (photo below) was also seen at Powassan Lagoon, although I was fortunate to see it on one of the beaches near North Bay's Government Dock. And then there were Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Least Sandpipers, Semipalmated Sandpipers, Solitary Sandpipers and Short-billed Dowitchers at the various lagoons and some at Lake Nipissing



Renee Levesque

beaches. And, of course, there were Killdeer and Spotted Sandpipers around, both of which stay in our area all spring and summer.

I find seeing shorebirds on sandy and rocky shores to be preferable to seeing them at lagoons because you can see them fairly close-up without a scope, making identification much easier and photo opportunities much better.

I don't think anyone has yet to report White-rumped Sandpipers.

Phalaropes are not to be left out, with Grant seeing the Wilson's at Warren Lagoon

and Dick and I and others seeing the Red-necked at Powassan Lagoon.

For most of the birds seen this September and not mentioned at the meeting, because we tended to concentrate in the last week or so before the meeting, refer to September's Bird Bash Report by Dick. If you can't find it in your inbox, it is posted on our website:

<https://www.nipnats.com/bird-wing/bird-bash-reports/>. We saw in total a good number of birds during September. Kevan Cowcill sent me an email on September 17 to inform me that at 11:20 that night there were "tens of thousands of birds migrating – many thrushes, warblers, sparrows, and quite a few I'm not sure about." Kevan went on to state "I haven't heard a migration this thick in years. Clouds and rain must have them kept low to the ground. I first thought the spring peepers were active again. I'm in awe of the numbers." For someone like me who is fast asleep by that time of the night, I am sorry I missed it. I doubt, like Kevan, I would have been able to make out each of the individual flight calls, but to hear that number in unison would have been something else.

Whip-poor-wills and Common Nighthawks: There was a brief discussion about the decline of these two birds, but I will leave that for a future report.

Winter Finch Report: Looks as if we should see most finches and finch-like birds this winter, with the possible exception of the White-winged Crossbill and the Pine Siskin. We should also see the three irruptive passerines – Blue Jays, Red-breasted Nuthatches and Bohemian Waxwings. For detailed information on Tyler Hoar's annual Winter Finch report, see: <https://finchnetwork.org/winter-finch-forecast-2023-2024>. Tyler dedicates the report to Ron Pittaway, the creator of the Winter Finch Report, who died in early August after a very rich birding life.

Hawk watches: Katharine McLeod, one of the Nocturnal Owl Survey Trophy winners, was not able to attend the meeting because she was at the Hawk Cliff Hawkwatch in Port Stanley near London. She reported it was a fantastic experience watching the hawks on their migration south. Each day during hawk migration, some of us receive the day's, month's and season's total from three hawk watch centres - Hawk Cliff, Holiday Beach Hawk Watch and Detroit River Hawk Watch. (You can Google each to get the numbers.) As of the date of the meeting, the numbers of Broad-winged Hawks (at right) are large, over 100,000, followed by Sharp-shinned Hawks at around 5,000. American Kestrel and Turkey Vulture numbers are starting to pick up.

Nocturnal Owl Survey: Oriana Pokorny was the only member of the winning team to be in attendance to accept the Nocturnal Owl Survey trophy on behalf of



the team. She received it from last year's winner, Dick Tafel who won it along with Erica Buck. Presentation photo is below. The other team members are Katharine, Fred Pinto who was in Nanaimo, and Joel and Jérémie Corbeil who were in Corbeil. I told Fred that being in Nanaimo was no excuse! Each member will take turns sharing the trophy. I bought the owl that sits on the base of the trophy when this "contest" was first initiated years ago and Ken Gowing made the base. Even though I will not be putting together an exclusive Nocturnal Owl Survey package, I will accept survey stories if those taking part write them and I will include them in the regular Bird Wing Report as I did this year.

So that our beautiful trophy will remain in circulation, Oriana came up with a good idea – we can put all participants' names in a hat and the name drawn gets to keep the trophy for the year, sharing it with team members. We will ensure the same team does not get it in subsequent years. And as I said in July's Bird Wing report, everyone who takes part on a chilly April night when there is often snow still on the ground and when roads can still be in rough shape is a winner!



Renee Levesque

Our Motus station is once again functional

By Sheldon McGregor

Earlier this spring, I had the opportunity to install a Motus receiver station at Thunder Cape Bird Observatory (TCBO) at the tip of Sleeping Giant, just southeast of Thunder Bay.

The Motus Wildlife Tracking System is an international project whereby birds, bats, insects and other animals that have been tagged with a transmitter send periodic signals back to a central system for processing and analysis.

The Motus stations are comprised of an antennae array connected to a receiver which processes the signals sent out by individual animals as they pass within 15 km of the station. The receiver then transmits the signals using a SIM card/cellular network back to the main processing centre. It is a tremendous tool which advances the ability to track individual movements, providing a much higher data return rate than the typical aluminum bird bands.

There is a network of receivers primarily in North America, but with growing coverage worldwide. (Motus is a Latin word that means movement. It is not an acronym.)

When I was working with Birds Canada to get the componentry for the TCBO station, I found out that the North Bay station (photo at top) was in need of maintenance. Given that I regularly pass through the area to my cottage or to pick blueberries or visit cousins, I volunteered to help out.

It was decided the best approach was to replace the receiver box – essentially a lunchbox-size Pelican case containing the computer chips and SIM card. I visited the station at the top of the Laurentian Ski Hill/North Bay Mattawa Conservation Authority (NBMCA) on August 30. What



Renee Levesque

a view!! I was able, with help from NBMCA staff, to access the storage box for the equipment and then to install and get the system functional. Photo of the Motus receiver box is below. We will be monitoring the station with help from NBMCA staff to ensure the station remains functional and doesn't have any power interruptions.

The station map to see the many Motus receivers can be viewed by clicking on this link: <https://motus.org/data/receiversMap?lang=en>. Zoom in to see the individual stations to check the status of each. (Click on the red dot when you have zoomed in close enough.) Note that "last data received" is not necessarily a signal from a bird, but just one of the periodic check-ins to ensure the station is powered and connected to the network. As for bird activity, I (or Renee) will periodically report to the group what tagged birds have been detected.

As you might notice from the station map, there are many stations in southern Ontario, but very few in the north. Hopefully some of those spaces on the map can be filled in over the next couple of years!



Sheldon McGregor

A lifelong birder invigorated by new lifers in Spain (and Italy)

By Kevan Cowcill; photos by Kevin or as indicated

There was a serendipitous set of events that culminated in my living in Spain for a month: I had a free place to stay (my sister lived in Madrid); I had free flights from pandemic compensation credits; and an online acquaintance invited me to join him and some others on a one-week bike tour in Italy (a hop, skip, and a jump from Spain). Plus, I know some Spanish, and I haven't taken a trip for myself in a couple of decades.

I arrived in Madrid, rented a bike, and set off to explore the Parque Casa de Campo. It was once owned by royalty before it was turned over to the public in 1931. With over 1700 ha (a hundred times larger than Laurier Woods), and over 100 kilometres of trails, the park is so large you'll seldom pass people despite the park's popularity. The climate is semi-arid, the park hilly with drought-tolerant shrubs, grasses, and pine trees, and there's shrubby tangled growth along the streams – a perfect haven for birds.

After decades of watching and listening to birds for hobby and work, it was invigorating and exciting to be in a place where every bird singing, calling, or flitting behind branches was one I hadn't seen before. “What's that bird?” my sister would ask as something zipped by too fast to identify, and I'd wistfully reply, “Probably a lifer.” There were Black Kites by the dozens, a few Red Kites, White Storks, and dozens of passerines.

Even common birds like the European Serin, Eurasian Blackbird (at right), and Eurasian Chaffinch were exciting to see, as were the various “chickadees” (Paridae family), all of which were easy to identify. There are five Paridae species on mainland Spain and I was delighted to see them all. The treecreepers were easy to identify by sight and by ear too—they looked and sounded similar to our Brown Creepers.

Along the shrubby streams, Nightingales regularly sang while staying mostly hidden behind twigs and leaves. Nightingales were the third bird on my “to see” wish list because they've inspired so many poems, books, and movies. And yes, they do sing all night, as in, right outside my bedroom window when I was in Italy!



The number one wish list bird was the Eurasian Hoopoe (at right) because for a long time I thought the exotic-looking bird was only in Africa, but I was thrilled to hear it many times in Spain.

The second bird on my wish list was the European Robin (a chat-thrush) because I wanted to see the bird that inspired early Europeans to name our red-breasted thrush the American Robin; and the phenomenal movie *Winged Migration* shows the European Robin in beautiful close-up as it hops through the shrub branches. (See extended preview on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AzJqF3WdN80>.)

One bird that surprised me was the Eurasian Golden Oriole (at right). I heard it calling on the far side of the river in a leafy tree. I didn't expect to see it because of distance and the thickness of the leaves. But its colouration was so bright, it was like a beacon catching the naked eye even at that distance. I let out an involuntary gasp at the richness of its plumage through binoculars.

Another very popular location in Madrid is the river. There are gardens, playgrounds, benches, lawns, bike and pedestrian pathways, many shade trees as well as historical and modern architecture mixed together. It is unlike anything I have seen before in terms of infrastructure dedicated to pedestrians, cyclists, and birds. What is remarkable is that it is only within the last 20 years that it was renaturalized for people and wildlife, but already it's winning international acclaim. It is a lesson in what we can do if we design cities for



Renee Levesque



Michel Idre, Wikipedia

people rather than cars. Moorhens and Egyptian Geese were regulars along the river, as were the White Wagtails strutting on the sidewalks picking up insects.

Even in the small urban parks, there'd be something new to see – two different species of parakeets (introduced) and a Green Woodpecker, number 4 on my wish list. (Photo at right.) This species went viral a few years ago when someone photographed it flying with a weasel on its back), and I wanted to see the flicker-sized woodpecker for myself. (If you haven't seen the photo of the woodpecker with the weasel on its back, see: <https://slate.com/technology/2015/03/weasel-on-a-woodpecker-photo-photographer-says-its-a-real-weaselpecker.html>.)



One of the highlights of my visit was a trip to Parque Nacional Monfragüe (Monfragüe National Park) a couple of hours north of Madrid. It has a long history: prehistoric cave paintings; evidence of an early agricultural society; Roman roads and bridges; castles and walls from the Middle Ages and the Spanish Wars of the 1800s. In the 1930s, the scrubby shrubland and mountainous regions were hideouts for guerrilla groups during the wars.

In the 1960s, a different fight ensued. People like Jesus Garzón fought to make the area a nature conservation area. In 1979 it was declared a National Park, and in 1988 the European Union made it a Special Protection Area for birds, followed by Spain's declaration of the same in 1991. By 2003, it was recognized by UNESCO as a Biosphere Reserve. It was expanded in the 2004, and in 2007, it became a National Park (again) this time by law.

Despite eradication of much of the tree, plant, and wildlife species by short-sighted forestry practices, and the subsequent disappearance of streams and their accompanying Mediterranean thickets and forests, the area was home to some amazing birds, especially the raptors, which had escaped the worst of the 2022 mega-fires that spread through the drought-stricken region.

There are more than 15 breeding species of raptors in the Park - the Eurasian Black Vulture (world's largest colony), Imperial Eagle (world's highest concentration), Spanish Imperial Eagle,

Golden Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Booted Eagle, and probably the most easily spotted, the Griffon Vulture (over 600 pairs). Photo of a Griffon Vulture is below.



Pierre Dalous, Wikipedia

Griffon Vultures nest on the cliffs alongside the road. There are pullovers and viewing platforms where motorists can stop to view them. There is almost an unreal quality to the way they're gliding. You are guaranteed to see them in the skies and on their nests early in the year.

Just outside the park where old tangled orchards provide cover, there were smaller birds such as the European Bee-eater, Western Black-eared Wheatear and Woodchat Shrike. The bee-eaters were calling regularly, but were hard to see while the shrike kept its distance as it watched for small lizards clambering on the stone walls.

The most difficult birds to identify at a glance were the warblers. Other birds, like the treecreepers, the firecrest (kinglet-like), the tits, the gulls (obviously), and the finches were easy enough to recognize as belonging to those groupings. The warblers, such as the Sardinian Warbler (photo at right), didn't jump out as a warbler species. I thought the Sardinian was originally a cuckoo and then a nightingale because both those birds were calling, and when I spotted the warbler in binoculars, it looked much larger than a warbler should.



Taking my Italy cycle trip into account, I ended up seeing over 90 species! In Italy, I saw a few different birds, including the Yellow-legged Gull and my favourite Italian bird, the Hooded Crow (photo at right). You don't often think of crows as beautiful, but the Hooded Crow was striking.

This was a once-in-a-lifetime trip...maybe. I've been invited back to cycle France to Spain, and my sister is telling me I should spend the winters there with her when I retire. She says, "You've spent your life studying birds, you may as well start migrating with them too." Not a bad idea at all.



Seeds and Cones

Turkey Vultures: In early September, I saw nine or more Turkey Vultures soaring overhead on Highway 17 West. I usually always see them soaring, although I have seen many roosting in trees, especially on Beaudry Road in West Nipissing, and I occasionally come upon one on the ground, usually eating its carrion and very rarely just posing as in the photo at right. However, as Lynne Freeman writes in her article “Nesting habits of Turkey Vultures” in the June 2023 edition of *OFO News*, most of us have never seen a Turkey Vulture nest or chick.



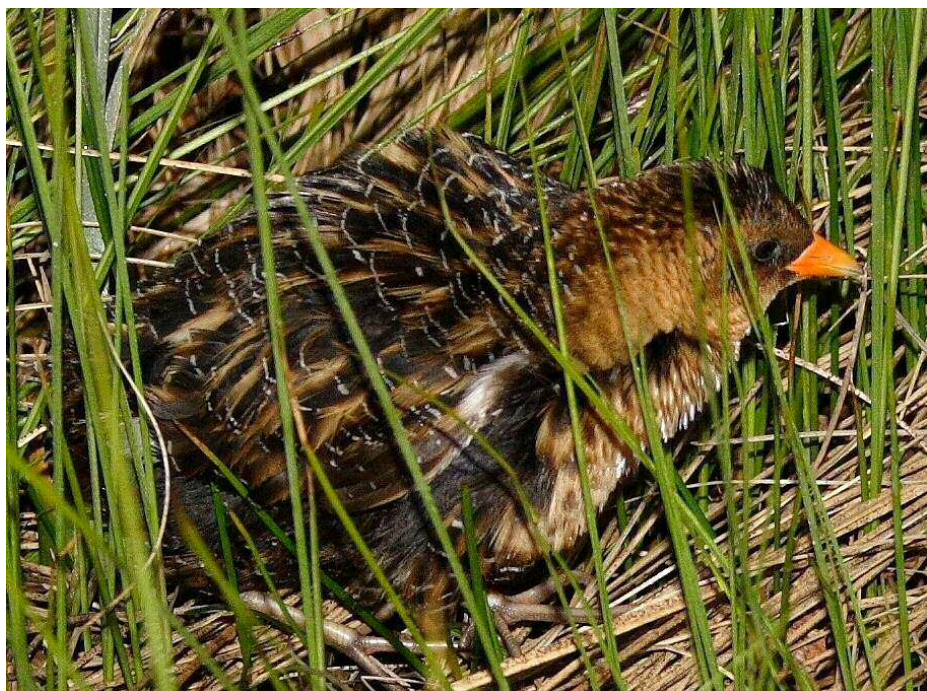
Renee Levesque

I think many of us assume Turkey Vultures build or reuse large nests in trees. But they don't even build nests. Instead, they “lay their eggs in caves, crevices, tree cavities, under logs, in abandoned nests and even in abandoned buildings.” They prefer dark spaces away from people.

Chicks are white when they are born and stay entirely white for the first five weeks or so. As they get older, they begin to acquire black feathers, although their heads stay featherless until they are older, when grey feathers develop. Although I don't suppose many of us have seen Turkey Vulture chicks, we have seen immatures with grey heads and with white showing through their black feathers. Their red heads are acquired only when they are fully mature.

Juveniles leave the nest site after fledging and no longer associate with the adults. Young birds form communal roosts and when it's time to migrate, they find their own way south, as many young birds do.

Provincial Bird: Ontario's official provincial bird is the Common Loon and why not, with all our many lakes – over 250,000 of them! Who hasn't heard that haunting cry of the loon on at least one of these lakes if not on many more? But what if instead of being measured by lakes, our provincial bird was determined by population? In the Spring 2023 edition of *Living Bird*, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, there is an article entitled “What if the State Birds Were Determined



Dominic Sherony, Wikipedia

by Data” by Matt Smith and Marc Devokaitis. (There is also a section on our provincial birds.) In Ontario instead of the loon, it would be the Yellow Rail (photo at left). Why? Because 73% of the global population of this bird breeds in Ontario!

But it is highly unlikely most of us would want our beloved loon replaced with a bird that Cornell Lab says is one of the hardest birds to see in all of North America. It is a bird most rarely, if ever, seen, except if you were on that outing on River Road years ago when one was spotted first by Laura Turcotte and then by others in the group, including

Dick Tafel. It was its call, which resembles the sound of two stones being clicked together, that gave this elusive bird away. It is not even an easy bird to flush. It relies on camouflage and escaping on foot through dense vegetation in its habitat of wet meadows, fens and shallow marshes.

Lifers: During August’s Bird Bash, Linda Stone spotted an American Pipit, a lifer for her, and during August’s and September’s Bird Bashes, Garry Waldram saw two Green Herons and an American Bittern in Laurier Woods, lifers for him.

Jérémie Corbeil, at 12 years of age, naturally saw many lifers during a family trip to Alberta in May. In Calgary, Jérémie saw a Black-billed Magpie and Lesser Scaup.

At Banff National Park, he saw many birds – Pine Siskins, Yellow-rumped Warblers (Audubon’s and Myrtle’s), Oregon Dark-eyed Junco, Mountain Chickadees, Violet-green Swallows and Chipping Sparrows.

Next stop was Red Deer/Blackfalds where Jérémie saw his cousins and many more birds, some lifers, some not – Northern Pintails, Ruddy Ducks, Bufflehead, Redheads, Northern Shovelers, Gadwalls, Blue-winged Teal, Mallards, Cinnamon Teals, Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Black-necked Stilts, American Avocet, Eared Grebes, Snow Geese, American Coots, Franklin’s Gulls, and a Brewer’s Blackbird. Jérémie says, “It was an amazing trip and I saw a total of 14 new species and 2 new subspecies!”



Rhododendrites, Wikipedia

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: On August 27, arriving in the yard of Stephen O'Donnell was a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (at left), not a species we see very often here. Stephen reports this is the third record of seeing the bird in his yard. The other two times occurred on September 1, 2015, and September 2, 2017. One was seen about 600m from his house on September 3, 2017, probably the same bird as the one that was in his yard the day before.

Great Egret: During August's Bird Bash, Dan Burton spotted a Great Egret, another rare bird for our area, in the wetland by Boundary Spur Road, just off Hwy 124. This is the second consecutive August one was seen during August's Bird Bash. Last August, Cindy Lafleur saw one in Laurier Woods at Arum Pond. As soon as we found out about Cindy's sighting, some

of us rushed to Laurier Woods the next morning, but unfortunately, the egret had moved on. There have been other sightings by Bird Wing members of the Great Egret in our area. Fred Pinto and Marc Buchanan saw one at Powassan Lagoon on August 30, 2015, and Dick and I saw one on Osprey Links on April 19, 2017. Photo of a Great Egret below.



Renee Levesque

Ontario Birds Records Committee Report for 2022: Every year in August's issue of *Ontario Birds*, the Ontario Birds Records Committee reviews rare bird reports in Ontario, with the province split into three review zones, South, Central and Lowland. If a bird is not rare in the South Zone, it could be rare in the Central and/or Lowland Zones. For 2022, a Forster's Tern was added to the Lowlands Zone, bringing its total to 332 species; no species were added to the Central Zone, leaving its total at 387 species; and two species were added to the South Zone – the Marsh Sandpiper and the Hepatic Tanager - bringing its total to 499 species.

It is always a thrill to find a rare bird in our area, and a special thrill if you were the one to first see it and report it. Dick Tafel, Lori Anderson and I spotted a Slaty-backed Gull at North Bay's landfill site in November 2018, the first sighting I believe of one here; and Vic Rizzo, Dick and I saw a Brambling at Vic's place in November 2014, also I believe the first sighting of one here. Both birds were later seen by others. Bird Wing thanked Vic and gave him a donation for seed and in 2015, he received, for hosting birders viewing the Brambling, a Certificate of Appreciation from Ontario Federation of Ornithologists. See:

<http://www.ofo.ca/site/Certificates#2015>.

This year Sheldon McGregor's name appears three times in the recent August edition of *Ontario Birds* for birds he saw in the Central Zone in May and June 2022 while he was volunteering at Thunder Cape near Thunder Bay – an Orchard Oriole (at right), a Summer Tanager and a Painted Bunting. These species were already on the Central Zone list, but were being reviewed to be accepted as rare birds for that zone. As some of you are aware, the Orchard Oriole was seen in our area in May 2019, by Gary Sturge in the Powassan area, and by former Bird Wing member Buddy Myles in Verner.



Buddy Myles

Bird Photography of the Year: Steve Pitt sent me this link to the winners of *The Atlantic* magazine's Bird Photography of the Year 2023:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2023/09/winners-bird-photographer-year-2023/675227/>.

Click on [full screen](#) near the top of the page to view the winners in all their splendour.