

# Bird Wing Report

November 2024



## Birding events not to be missed

**Bird Bash:** December's Bird Bash is this coming weekend, **December 7-8**. An excellent opportunity to see what birds may be on your Christmas Bird Count Route.

**Sweetman's Gardens:** A council meeting is to be held on December 10, 2024, to discuss what is to become of Sweetman's Gardens, a local patch of plants, shrubs and trees that nesting and migrating birds enjoy. See Linda Stoner's article inside this issue.

**Christmas Bird Count (CBC):** This year's Christmas Bird Count is on **Saturday, December 14**. Field Observers are in place and ready to hit the snowy roads and trails. Many feeder watchers have been lined up, but there is always room for more, so if you are interested and live within the required circle, please let Lori Anderson know at [lori.anderson@hotmail.com](mailto:lori.anderson@hotmail.com). If in doubt, the circle can be found on Nipissing Naturalists Club's website or by contacting Lori.



*Corinne Urutia*

**Bird Wing Meeting:** Our next Bird Wing meeting is not until **Tuesday, January 27, 2025**. Details will follow closer to the time.

## **Bird Wing Zoom Meeting**

We had our first Zoom meeting of the season on November 26. We particularly welcomed Mary Young who participated in her first Zoom meeting with us since she joined Bird Wing this past summer.

Linda Stoner then provided an update on the devastation of the area behind Sweetman's Gardens, a well-known local birding area, and encouraged us to attend the North Bay council meeting about this issue on **Tuesday evening, December 10.**



*Rough-legged Hawk, Stephen O'Donnell*

After Linda's presentation, we got to the naming of our two birds, but before I list what they were, I was not able to stay after the naming of the two birds to hear Fred Pinto's presentation of the birds he saw during his Arctic voyage last year. However, I was able to stay long enough to introduce him, not that he needed much of an introduction because who doesn't know Fred? I understand from others that Fred's presentation was excellent. Fred said he would write an article about his trip for a future Bird Wing Report.

### **Birds Seen in November:**

There is no discernible order to the list below of birds seen. The order is based on where I could insert photos without cramping the photos and text.

**Slaty-backed Gull:** Further to the article on the Slaty-backed Gull in last month's report, we did not have to wait 6 years for the Slaty-backed Gull to return again to Nipissing District, but just a scant couple of weeks before a second Slaty was seen. On November 9, Stephen O'Donnell was birding at the East Ferris landfill site when he saw one, thinking it was the one previously seen on Lake Nosbonsing. He took a picture of it and posted it on Discord. After he posted it, Brandon Holden reported it was a different Slaty-backed than the one seen on Lake Nosbonsing. After Stephen uploaded his photos, it became obvious there were two Slaty-backs. The landfill

site one had a darker eye, some slight difference in mantle colouring and less streaking on the head.

On November 11, the Slaty at the East Ferris landfill site was seen again by Lucas Beaver and on the same day, he also saw the one on Lake Nosbonsing. The Nosbonsing one, first seen by Garry Waldram on October 13, was not reported, to my knowledge, from October 25 until November 8 when Aaron Hywarren, a birder from the Ottawa area, spotted it. It was seen subsequently by Stephen, Mary and Garry.

For the meeting, Stephen put together a compilation of the two Slatys to show the differences. See photo below.



Then on November 23, Dick Tafel and I saw one at North Bay's landfill site. We couldn't get close enough for me to take a good photo, although I did get an identification photo. It looked at the time to resemble more the East Ferris gull, but I can't be sure of that. It could be that a third Slaty decided Nipissing District is the place to be!

**Nuthatches:** The White-breasted Nuthatch was seen by Pat Stack, and the Red-breasted by Fred Pinto. Most of us have seen both nuthatches, especially at our feeders. I had the White-breasted

for the longest time and no Red-breasted, then both for a lengthy period of time, and now just the Red-breasted. It has been a couple of weeks since the White-breasted was around and I can't help but wonder where it went.

**Blue Jay:** Pat's second bird was the Blue Jay, another bird most of us have seen. I get up to 6 or so at my feeder and when they aren't there, they sure suddenly arrive in full force when a new bird comes to town, so to speak. The day after our meeting, a Common Grackle surprisingly showed up, and suddenly the jays were back again.

**Carolina Wren:** Recently, Linda Stoner was birding in Sweetman's Gardens when she saw a Carolina Wren. She heard it first and followed its call until she saw it. The last reported Carolina Wren was one Diane Deagle had in her yard in mid-September. Diane lives in the same general area, so maybe it is the same wren.

**Iceland and Glaucous Gulls:** In addition to the Slaty-backed Gull, Garry also saw an Iceland and a Glaucous Gull on Lake Nosbonsing, both gulls lifers for him. Subsequently, Dick and I saw both at the Merrick Landfill Site in North Bay.

We have been to this landfill site three times now and this year, we have been very restricted on where we can go. We are allowed to park in the mattress drop-off parking lot, but have not been allowed to drive around the site. A scope is definitely required to make out all the gulls that can be seen from the mattress parking lot. There are plenty of gulls around the other side of the landfill site that can't be seen. **Stephen's photo of a first winter or first cycle Iceland Gull is on the cover this month** and a photo of a first winter or first cycle Glaucous Gull is at right. (Some Iceland Gulls are very white in colour and others, like the one on the cover, are a buffy cream colour, but both are still first winter or first cycle gulls.)

**Bufflehead:** Katherine McLeod also saw Buffleheads on Circle Lake and many were seen by others elsewhere. It was a duck that seemed to be everywhere and especially prevalent in the lagoons in early November.



**Rough-legged Hawk:** Lori Anderson saw a Rough-legged Hawk on her farm and Stephen saw and photographed one (**photo at heading of the article**) on Purdon Line, always a good place to find one on its migration north and south.

**Common Merganser:** Denise Desmarais saw male Common Mergansers, as did Stephen, Garry, Dick Tafel and I, and perhaps others. The Common Merganser is considered a cold-hardy duck that nests along ocean coasts and near large lakes and rivers within forested areas. Males remain near the nest site into the incubation period and then leave to go further north to larger lakes, rivers and bays to moult, leaving the females to raise the young. As Stephen reported, we do not see male Common Mergansers in our area until late October and into November.

**Red-necked Grebe:** Katherine saw a Red-necked Grebe on Circle Lake in North Bay and a few others saw one elsewhere, after a flurry of earlier reported Horned Grebe sightings.

**Northern Shrike:** Lori also saw a Northern Shrike on her farm. I had one in my yard a couple of times and Garry saw at least four throughout his travels, mostly in Calvin Township.



**Garry Waldram**

**Snow Buntings:** Linda Conway saw the beautiful little Snow Bunting (photo at left) and many of us had seen a drift of them at various locations. They were especially prominent at Powassan Lagoon recently where Dick and I saw a drift of about 50.

**Common Raven:** Linda also saw Common Ravens, as have most of us. A couple live near my house and I watch for them and listen for them every morning heading into the woods. They are one of my favourite winter birds.

**Northern Cardinal:** Mary Young had a Northern Cardinal at her feeder. She reports her son, Lucas Beaver, had a pair at his feeder for a couple of days. Since the October Bird Wing Report in which I mentioned that Donna Duncan, Grant McKercher and I saw the cardinal, others

have since come forward –Denise, Steve Pitt, Garry, April McCrum, Gary and Luanne Chowns and Steve Taylor, a lifer for him.

**Cooper's Hawk:** On the same day Linda saw the Carolina Wren at Sweetman's Gardens, she also saw a Cooper's Hawk (photo at right) going after one of the birds. It can be difficult to tell a Cooper's from a Sharp-shinned Hawk. In the past, Cooper's Hawks were not what one would call an urbanized hawk like the Sharp-shinned, but that has since changed because of the popularity of backyard feeders and the availability, therefore, of feeder birds. This isn't the first year one has been seen in the wider Pinewood area of North Bay.



Linda Stoner

**Sparrows:** The only sparrow mentioned was the American Tree which Mary and I had at our feeders. We are hoping they stay around for the Christmas Bird Count. I read on eBird that Kaye Edmonds recently had a White-throated Sparrow in her yard. Kaye is a long-time CBC feeder watcher, so she may be able to see it for the count.

**White-winged Scoter:** Continuing with sea ducks seen in October, Kim Stahl saw a White-winged Scoter in Lake Nipissing at Sunset Park, a lifer for her. It was also seen by Dick, Garry, Mary and I at Sunset Park, and by Stephen in Lake Bernard.

**Great Blue Heron:** A week or so ago, Denise saw three Great Blue Herons on Cache Lake near her cottage. Under "Seeds and Cones", you can read about the swallowing habits of a Great Blue Heron, thanks to a photo Steve Pitt sent me.

**Red-bellied Woodpecker:** Continuing with the sightings seen in October, Mary also had a Red-bellied Woodpecker at her feeder, a fairly regular visitor to her feeders most years! Hope it stays for the Christmas Bird Count. No other woodpeckers were mentioned, although most of us have seen the Hairy and the Downy. Faye Oei, who couldn't stay for the entire meeting because she recently had knee surgery, sent me a text listing a Pileated as one of her birds. (We wish you a speedy recovery, Faye, although I am sure the recovery is not happening fast enough for you!)

**Surf Scoter:** After a few visits to Sunset Park and spending much time looking, I finally saw a Surf Scoter, as did Garry, Dick and Mary. Although the male is quite something in appearance, the female looks more like the White-winged Scoter, without the small white wing patch and

with a white patch on the back of its head, and with the forward patch on its face vertical and not horizontal like the White-winged, although this can be hard to discern unless the scoter is close enough,. Below is a photo of the male Surf Scoter (right) to compare it with the female and first winter. (As of the writing of this report, a Black Scoter has not yet been spotted to my knowledge.)



*Alan D. Wilson, Wikipedia*



*Stephen O'Donnell*

**Finches and grosbeaks:** Fred saw American Goldfinch in Laurier Woods and others have seen them at their feeders and elsewhere. No one mentioned grosbeaks – maybe because we ran out of time – but both the Pine and Evening have been in my yard since our meeting.

**Grouse:** Kim was startled by a Ruffed Grouse and who hasn't been while quietly walking through the woods? Faye's second bird was also a Ruffed Grouse.

**Swans:** Both the Trumpeter and Tundra Swans continued to be seen into November. There was a flock of Trumpeters at Cache Bay in early November, with many non-birders arriving to see them, and a lone one near a beach in front of a residence that Dick and I saw from Sunset Park in mid-November. Tundras were seen on Lake Nipissing from Beaucage Park Road and from Jocko Point where Dick recently saw about 60.

**Ducks:** Other than the Buffleheads, scoters and the mergansers, indicated above, no other ducks were mentioned, but many other ducks were seen throughout November. The Green-winged Teal seemed to stay longer than usual at the various lagoons and was seen by many; there was a late Northern Pintail at the Government Dock seen by Garry and me; a Red-breasted Merganser was seen on Talon Lake and perhaps elsewhere by some of us; and a Long-tailed Duck was seen



by Stephen, Sue Gratton, Mary, me, Dick and Garry at various lakes – Lake Talon, Lake Bernard and Lake Nipissing. (Photo of one at right.)

**Greater White-fronted Goose:**

Many saw the Greater White-fronted Goose when it was discovered in Lee Park back in October, as reported in October's issue. But one showed up again in mid-November. On November 14, I saw one swimming with the gulls by the Government Dock. I almost overlooked it because I wasn't expecting to see one swimming among the gulls. It was its orange bill that finally caught my attention before it flew off after being spooked by a Great Black-backed Gull that flew menacingly towards it. Then, on November 15, Stephen saw and photographed one in Lee Park.



*Stephen O'Donnell*

Its bill was lighter and its black markings were different than the one seen in October. See photo at left that Stephen compiled comparing Linda Stoner's photo and Grant McKercher's October photos with his photos. The goose I saw at the Government dock seemed to have quite an orange bill, but perhaps that was as a result of the light that day or perhaps next to the gulls with their yellow bills, it just seemed very orange. So, not only did we have two rare birds here in October and November, but we had at least two, and possibly three, of each.



Stephen O'Donnell



Linda Stoner



Stephen O'Donnell



Grant McKercher

## Sweetman's Gardens, a North Bay treasure

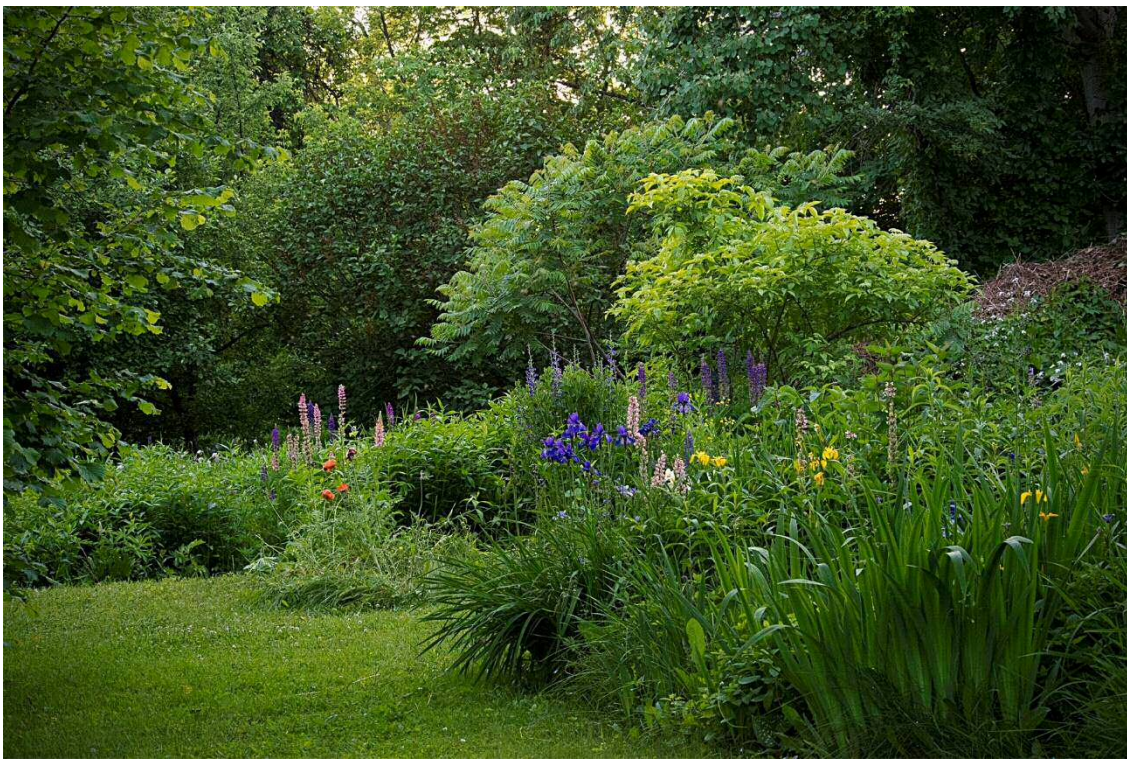
*Text and photos by Linda Stoner*

As I am sure a lot of you know by now, the city has clear-cut the pathway (photo at right) at the end of McIntyre Street next to Sweetman's Gardens, apparently getting ready to extend a road through to Timmins Street. Naturally, many residents are now worried about the preservation of Sweetman's Gardens.

Beginning in 1962, Murray Sweetman created a beautiful garden behind his home out of wasteland, turning it into a tourist attraction within the City of North Bay. In his later years and after he died in 2012, North Bay citizens continued their maintenance of the property.

There will be a presentation to North Bay City Council on **Tuesday, December 10. The council meeting starts at 6:30 pm.** At this meeting there will be a PowerPoint presentation to inform the councilors about the gardens and its history and to explain its value to so many citizens.

The gardens are not only beautiful and a peaceful place for a stroll, but they are an important haven for birds – nesting birds as well as migrating birds in the spring and fall. (See photo below.) **To help get this message across and hopefully help prevent further destruction in the area, it would help if as many people as possible filled the chairs in support of the Gardens.**



## Seeds and Cones

**Colour variations:** In October, Pat Stack saw a leucistic or possible hybridized Canada Goose in the Talon Lake area (photo at right). In September 2019, I saw one in Lee Park looking very similar to Pat's, only with more white on its face. And every now and then if you look closely, you will see a Canada Goose with more subtle colour variations. I once saw one in Vancouver with a grey neck and face.



Pat Stack

**October Big Day: October Dig Day:** October Big Day was held on October 12 and once again, it demonstrated the “power of participatory science.” In one day, approximately 748,000 birdwatchers from 202 countries participated in a shared goal – “recording and appreciating the diversity of birdlife that surrounds us.” It was the most successful October Big Day ever, breaking a world record with 7,849 species recorded in a single day.

The top five countries in terms of species identified were Columbia, Peru, Brazil, Ecuador and Bolivia. In Canada, 340 species were identified, with Ontario clocking in at 222 species. However, in terms of participation and checklists submitted, Canada was second behind the United States

In Nipissing District, 88 species were seen, including those seen in Algonquin Park. Bird Wing members who took part were Jérémie Corbeil, Diane Deagle, Renee Levesque, Grant McKercher and Garry Waldram. (Not a Bird Wing member, but a Nipissing District participant who helped keep our numbers high was Lucas Beaver who saw 75 of the 88 species identified.) I could not find any Bird Wing members who took part in the Parry Sound District where 70 species were found. Although our number of species seen was high, in terms of participation, it was not a

great turn-out of Bird Wing members, but Big Day being held over our Thanksgiving weekend probably didn't help. (Some members may have been away and participated in other districts.) One of the 88 species seen was a Greater Scaup whose photo is at left.



Renee Levesque

The next Big Day is **May 10, 2025**.

**Books:** There are two new bird books on the market that some of you may like to read – and write a short book report about. One is called *Purposeful Birdwatching: Getting to Know Birds Better* by Rob Hume, Pelagic Publishing. Rob is the former editor of *BirdLife* in the UK and a lifelong birder. This book is not a field guide but more about “how to be a robust birdwatcher”. And to be a robust birdwatcher you have to spend time in the field and live “in intimacy with a local patch”. It is a book that “encourages you to embrace birdwatching in a meaningful way and not just through technology.”

The other book, *The Backyard Bird Chronicles*, written and illustrated by Amy Tan with a forward by David Allen Sibley and published by Knopf, is also about the connection we have with nature and birds, birds in our own backyard, the “connection between the watcher and the watched.” Amy writes, “Not that long ago, I would have described what was happening in simpler terms: Birds come and go. Now standing still, I am watching them and they are watching me, and we see each other hiding in plain sight.” All of us who embrace bird watching know this to be true! Amy has written several novels, perhaps the best known being *The Joy Luck Club*.

**Great Blue Heron:** Steve Pitt sent me a photo he took of a Great Blue Heron (GBH) and this narrative that accompanied the photo: “It was standing there with its beak open and there appeared to be something sticking out of its throat. It stood this way, mouth agape, for at least two minutes. I thought the object in its beak might be the tail of a long fish, like a pike or (shudder) even a muskrat tail. I also wondered if the poor bird accidentally got a sharp stick caught in its throat or some kind of human-caused mayhem. But once I uploaded the photos and was able to enlarge them, it was obvious the bird was just standing there with its beak open and its tongue sticking out. I could also see that when it finally flew, it closed its beak normally so it wasn't in trouble. I did get one good shot (above) of that tongue – complete with a backwards pointing barb halfway up which meant almost anything going into that beak wasn't likely coming back out.”



Steve Pitt

Steve asked me about the tongue and I responded by telling him that birds' tongues are used to swallow food, but this is especially true of the GBH. It needs its tongue to not get in the way so it can swallow fish and other foods, like frogs, whole. Its tongue construction also enables the GBH to turn the fish in its mouth so it can eat its meal head-first.

**Name Changes:** Further to my article in “Seeds and Cones” in the August 2024 issue, just to reiterate now that winter is practically upon us, that the Common and Hoary Redpolls (as well as Europe’s Lesser Redpoll) are now one species and are known only as Redpolls. However, you can still indicate the three types of Redpolls as subspecies. With name changes come code changes for those who use codes. The Redpoll is now REDP.

Also, Herring Gulls are no longer simply called Herring Gulls, but American Herring Gulls. It was actually back in 1862 that it was first determined the American and European Herring Gulls were separate species, but it wasn’t until 2002 that it was recognized by the British Ornithologists’ Union (BOU) as a separate species and not until this year that the American Ornithological Society (AOS) came on board. I think most of us, unless we are gull experts, would have difficulty distinguishing one from the other, but I read the European ones are smaller than the American ones and although there are some differences in colour, those differences are minimal. The European gulls also lack some of the markings American gulls have on their primaries. But I think it is safe to say that if you see a Herring Gull in Europe, it will probably be a European Herring Gull (photo above) and if you see one in North America, it will probably be an American. The code for our Herring Gull is now AHGU and no longer HEGU.



Scott Wieman, Wikipedia

Herring Gulls in Europe are in decline, but if you have seen any there, as I have, you will gain an extra species, making up for losing a species you may have seen, the Hoary Redpoll.

And as stated in a previous Bird Wing Report, in 2023 the AOS divided the Northern Goshawk into two separate species, calling the North American one the American Goshawk (code now AGOS) and the European one, the Eurasian Goshawk. American Goshawks are generally slightly smaller in size than most Eurasian ones, although there can be regional differences in size. The above name changes will be important in providing a list of species we may see during our Christmas Bird Count.

## Birds seen elsewhere

**Eastern Europe:** Mary Young spent two weeks in Eastern Europe in October. It was not a birding tour, but as all birders know, binoculars are not far from the eyes of a birder no matter it is not a birding tour. And good job Mary did keep hers handy because she saw quite a few birds, including some lifers!



*Francis C. Franklin, Wikipedia*

One very special bird Mary saw in Prague by the famous medieval Charles Bridge that crosses the Vltava River was the Long-tailed Tit, a lifer for her (photo above). If you are not familiar with this bird, found across Europe, it just happens to be one of those tiny birds you can't help but call a cute little fluffball with its white face and head, tiny black eyes and beak, and a long black and white tail, longer than its body. Its back is white, black and pink and its belly, a pale pink. It is a sociable and nosy bird, seen usually in flocks of 20 or more. Mary considers seeing this bird one of the highlights of her trip.

Other lifers include a European Coot, a Eurasian Green Woodpecker, a Eurasian Collared Dove, a Red Kite, a Rook, a Eurasian Jackdaw, a Eurasian Moorhen, a Great Cormorant, a Little Grebe, a Black-headed Gull, a Common Chaffinch, a Common Buzzard, a Black Redstart and a Carrion Crow.

In total, Mary saw 30 species.

**Niagara Peninsula:** Closer to home, Garry Waldram birded in the Niagara Peninsula in late October, with his trip yielding two lifers, a Surf Scoter, seen at Confederation Park in Hamilton, and a Black-bellied Plover seen at Long Point.

Other birds seen at Confederation Park were Black and White-winged Scoters, Long-tailed Ducks, Horned Grebes and Ruddy Ducks. A Harlequin Duck had been reported in the area but

unfortunately Garry didn't see it. In Hamilton, Garry also birded at Fifty Point Conservation Area where he saw many of the same species.

In Grimsby on the Forty Mile Creek trails, Garry found a Northern Shoveler, a Bonaparte's Gull, many Hermit Thrushes, both kinglets, Winter and Carolina Wrens, to name a few.



Garry Waldram

At Short Hills Provincial Park near St. Catherines, Garry saw a Tufted Titmouse (photo at left), Red-bellied Woodpeckers and Northern Cardinals, to name just some. Merlin picked up a Long-eared Owl, but although Garry spent time searching for it, he couldn't find it.

On the last full day of his trip, Garry checked out Long Point for the very first time. At Big Creek National Area, in addition to his lifer, the Black-bellied Plover, Garry saw many other shorebirds, as well as Tundra Swans, Mute Swans, Sandhill Cranes, Northern Pintail and Green-winged Teal. Merlin picked up a Long-billed Dowitcher, but again Garry was not able to find it.

He also missed seeing the three Hudsonian Godwits that made an appearance at Long Point's Causeway while he walking the Big Creek trails. But he did see at the Causeway, Dunlin, Killdeer, Sanderling, Black-bellied and American Golden Plovers, a single Wilson's Snipe, large flocks of teal, a Peregrine Falcon and a Northern Harrier, to name just some.

Garry reports he will definitely be going back to Long Point next year, perhaps during spring migration.

**Pakistan:** Chris Sukha was in Pakistan, not to bird but to do church work. It is not often I know someone who has been to Pakistan, and although Chris did not bird per se, like Mary and as a birder, Chris can't help but notice birds. I asked Chris what his highlight was in terms of birds and he said a Blue Whistling-thrush, actually an Old World flycatcher, and not a thrush, found in Central, South and Southeast Asia, as well as China.

It gets its name from its dark violet blue colour and for its loud whistling song, a long piercing note, sung at dawn and dusk. With its yellow bill in contrast with its dark blue body and the silvery spots found on its head, back and wings, it is what one might call a handsome bird. And although not a true thrush, it is found on the ground, turning over leaves and cocking its head.



JJ Harrison, Wikipedia