

BIRD WING OUTING and MEETING

October 27, 2015

Owlaveen: With Halloween approaching and the evening mild and the moon big and bright, Bird Wingers celebrated Owlaveen. Never mind that owls tend to be on the move when a cold front moves through and when there is little moonlight! After a shortened meeting and with hot chocolate and our pockets full of Halloween goodies, we set out on an owl adventure.

With apologies to Alfred Noyes and his poem, *The Highwayman*:

The Owlers

The wind was a silent darkness among the white birch trees.

The moon had a ghostly fullness, there wasn't even a breeze.

The road was a ribbon of moonlight through the forest floor,

And the Birders came driving –

Driving – driving –

The Birders came driving to the end of Johnson Road.

At the end of Johnson Road, we stood in the moonlit darkness while Dick Tafel played his owl tapes with the aid of cell phone flashlights. We stood and we stood and we stood and we waited and we waited and we waited. Nothing except a dog barking in the distance and the hoots and screeches of owls from the recorder. The screeches because sometimes the Screech Owl tape got mixed in with the Great Horned Owl and the Northern Saw-whet Owl tapes. (Both the latter owls had been seen and heard in the same area in other years.)

Eventually giving up were Fred Pinto and Steph Romaniuk, special guest and former president of the Nipissing Naturalist Club, followed by Gary and Connie Sturge. The rest of us stayed on and happy we did because what should appear, but a Long-eared Owl lit up by the rising full moon in the night sky. This wondrous sight, as seen at right, was captured on camera by Renee Levesque and Kaye Edmonds. Shows those who left early that they



Photo by Kaye Edmonds and Renee Levesque

should not have left early.

If seeing a Long-eared Owl in the rising full moon wasn't a highlight enough, on our way back, we stopped at a field to allow Laura Chowns to call for the owls. Laura and the owls have this special relationship and she says they tend to respond to her rather marvellous calls. Sure they may not have responded to her that night, perhaps because there were too many of us around to allow Laura to commune with them, BUT, a nearby resident arrived, alarmed by the number of people gathered near her field in which there were horses. After we assured her we were not after her horses, but owls, she joined us in our watch and told us she gets Wilson Snipes in the spring and summer.

It really was a fun evening, a perfect way for birders to celebrate Owlween.

Birds Seen During October: Like clockwork every fall, the White-crowned Sparrows (seen at right) and the American Tree Sparrows return. This year did not disappoint, although seemingly this year, many more White-crowns than American Trees. Song and White-throated Sparrows were still to be found, but less and less as the month wore on. Dick was fortunate enough to see a Field Sparrow in the field beside Stradwick's and Renee was fortunate enough to see a Fox Sparrow in an area off Jocko Point Road.

Fred saw a Snowy Owl near Laurentian Public School and a few days before that Mark Olivier's sister, Lori, called Dick with a sighting of one near McDonald's in West Ferris. This may be the earliest sightings since the irruption of Snowy Owls two years ago.

Golden-crowned Kinglets were seen by many and it is always so delightful when one tilts its head so that its golden crown is visible. Dark-eyed Juncos migrating through were also seen by many and some may even stay the winter as they did at Matt Walter's last winter and at Renee's the winter before. American Pipits were seen by Brent Turcotte at Sunset Park and by Lori Anderson at her place in Chisholm Township.

Canada Geese abound, as reported by Curtis Irish, and another two Snow Geese were seen with Canada Geese in a field by Powassan Lagoon earlier in the month. Were these the same two as were seen in Lake Nipissing by Therez Violette and others? (Therez's photo, which made the



Bird Wing and the Nipissing Naturalist Club newsletters last month was also recently featured in *The Nugget's Community Voices.*)

Herring Gulls are migrating through by the hundreds and seen at Sunset Park and at other spots along the Lake Nipissing. A few Great Black-backed Gulls were also seen at Sunset Park.

Lori Anderson has already had Snow Buntings, Horned Larks (seen below) and a Lapland Longspur at her place.



Photo by Ernie Frayle

American Robins have been seen in goodly numbers throughout the region and by the darker colouring on many of these robins, they are probably migrating through from further north. A few Hermit Thrushes were also seen.

There appears to be an increase in sightings of Ruffed Grouse throughout the region and during the month of October, there seemed to more sightings of Rusty Blackbirds (seen at right) than in recent years.

Gary and Connie have Purple Finches at their place in Powassan and Dick saw five on Riding Stable Road.



Photos by Linda Stoner

Renee has had a couple of Gray Jays (seen at right) at her place in the north end. They tend to come around when hunting season is under way. Blue Jays were seen by many, as were Black-capped Chickadees, European Starlings, Common Grackles, American Crows and Common Ravens.

The only woodpecker mentioned was the magnificent Pileated, although the Hairy has been seen but not reported at the meeting. Northern Flickers have now migrated, but some were still being seen in the earlier part of October.

The only raptors reported were Northern Harriers seen by Gary at his place and by others in West Nipissing. However, a Bald Eagle has been seen on one of the islets off Sunset Park – and many are no doubt at the landfill site – and a Red-tailed Hawk has been seen on Hwy. 17 W. just outside North Bay. Rough-legged Hawks should be coming through soon, so watch for them.

As usual during September and October, Sandhill Cranes gathered in large numbers in fields, primarily in West Nipissing.

Many kinds of ducks have been seen in Lake Nipissing and at the various lagoons. New Birdwing member, Lisa Hackett, reports recently seeing Green-winged Teal which have been seen in great numbers this fall. Other ducks seen include Common Goldeneye, many seen off Sunset Park; Lesser Scaup; Bufflehead, close to a hundred if not more recently at Callander Lagoon; the ever-present Mallard; the odd American Black Duck; the odd Wood Duck; and some Northern Shoveler. Also seen were many American Coots in both the Warren and Callander Lagoons.

In the fall, as in the spring, we look for shorebirds migrating through. This fall, there does not seem to have been many as far as numbers go, but there have been some very interesting sightings. Probably the most interesting was the Ruddy Turnstone seen by Dick, Renee and Marc Buchanan at Sunset Park. It is not often we get this shorebird and so the photo at left is repeated.



The same photo was in last month's newsletter when it was hoped one would be seen during the boat trip to Sandy Island. It wasn't seen. The irony is that Marc did not have to leave far from home, if at all, to see one! Dick and Renee saw yet another Black-bellied Plover at Sunset. Dick also saw two Western Sandpipers at Powassan Lagoon, another species not often seen here.



The day after our meeting, Therez, Dick and Renee saw 32 Tundra Swans on Lake Nipissing at Marleau Road, Sturgeon Falls, probably the most any of us have seen in this region. Only one immature was noted among the many adults. Subsequent to this visit, others have seen the Tundra Swans, though perhaps not as many as the initial thirty-two. In the photo above are two adults and an immature.

Species not reported and not seen, but which we still might see or which should be seen are the phalaropes, one seen last November at Warren Lagoon by Lori and Ken Gowan during the Bird Bash, and all three scoters - Black, White-winged and Surf - usually seen by scope at Sunset Park. No one this fall has yet reported sighting the Long-tailed Duck, sometimes seen in Lake Nipissing, and mention was made of the scarcity of American Goldfinch, although Dick has had a dozen at his feeders.

Winter Finch Forecast: The winter finch forecast for 2015-16 has been made by Ron Pittaway and you can view it in its entirety at <http://jeaniron.ca/2015/forecast15.htm>

However, to summarize, here is what Ron is forecasting:

1. Pine Grosbeaks (seen at right) will move south to Algonquin Park and probably further south because the mountain ash berry crop is below average across the boreal forest.



2. Red Crossbills will move into southern Ontario because the birch seed crops are low in northern Canada.
3. White-winged Crossbills will be scarce in most of Ontario because spruce cone crops are low.
4. Common Redpolls will move south of Algonquin Park because birch seed crops are low to average across the boreal forest.
5. Purple Finches (seen at right) will migrate south out of Ontario because cone and deciduous seeds are low in Northern Ontario. Perhaps the Purple Finches seen locally in October were on their way south.
6. Pine Siskin numbers will be low in Ontario this winter because white spruce crops are low.
7. Evening Grosbeaks are expected to be in Central Ontario because of the outbreaks of spruce budworms.



Christmas Bird Count: The North Bay Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be held on **Saturday, December 19**, and Lori Anderson will once again be the compiler. She will be organizing the teams at the November meeting of Bird Wing, so those who take part in the Christmas Bird Count teams should make it a point to attend. There are seven designated routes within a 15-mile radius of North Bay; however, those not involved in the route count but who live within the 15-mile radius can contribute by counting their feeder and yard birds. We hope that unlike last year, there will be more open water as in the photo below of Dick scoping Trout Lake during the Christmas Bird Count of 2012.



More details regarding the CBC will be provided by Lori at November's meeting.

For over a decade, Dick Canning has been the Canadian coordinator for the Christmas Bird Count. However, in our recent federal election, Dick ran as the NDP candidate for South Okanagan-West Kootenay and was successful. So it is off to Ottawa and a new career for Dick.

Mike Burrell, the Ontario Coordinator for the Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas Program and eBird Canada, will take over Dick's Christmas Bird Count duties. Mike will be in touch with the compilers within the next week or two.

Congratulations to both Dick and Mike.

Project FeederWatch:

Project FeederWatch starts on **Saturday, November 14, 2015, and continues to Friday, April 8, 2016.** You pick two consecutive days and count all the birds you see at or near your feeders during these two days, after which you enter your count either online or by submitting a tally sheet if you prefer to do it by paper and pen. You cannot change your count days once you begin and it is okay to not enter anything if you are away during your chosen days or count time.



To take part in this citizen science project sponsored by The Cornell Lab and Bird Studies Canada, you must be a member of Bird Studies Canada. An annual membership costs \$35.00 and you can join online. For details, see <http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pfw/>

If you are already a member of Bird Studies Canada and have participated previously in Project FeederWatch, no need to do anything, but click on "Logon for Registered FeederWatchers" on the left hand side of the link provided above.

Brambling: It is going on a year (November 26, 2014) since Vic Rizzo and Dick and Renee first saw the Brambling at Vic's. Renee filed a report with Ontario Field Ornithologists (OFO) and the sighting was accepted. In the August 2015 edition of *Ontario Birds*, Journal of the Ontario Field Ornithologists, the Brambling sighting is reported, along with the photo at right taken by Renee and submitted with the report. The Journal reports that the timing of our Brambling coincides with an influx of others in North America in mid-November. The other sightings as reported on eBird were in Wyoming, California, Washington and British Columbia.



Vic is to be sent a well-deserved certificate of appreciation by OFO for allowing birders to visit his property to view the Brambling.

Bird Bash: November's Bird bash takes place over a **24-hour period over the weekend of November 7 and 8.**

Bird Wing Meeting: The next Bird Wing meeting is on **Tuesday, November 24**, starting at 6:30 p.m. in the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library.

Text: Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe

Photos: Renee Levesque unless otherwise indicated.

Photo by Kaye Edmonds

