

## BIRD WING MEETING

April 28, 2015

The last indoor Bird Wing meeting of the season was held at the North Bay Public Library on Tuesday, April 28, 2015. For the rest of the spring and during the summer months, field trips will replace indoor meetings.

**Birds Seen In April:** Although one robin does not a spring make, many American Robins do. After a cold and harsh winter, the first sighting of a Robin was indeed a joy, or as Monique Beauparlant put it, "It made me clap my hands with glee!"



As witnessed by the number of birds seen during the Bird Bash, April was a good birding month, with a total of 89 species seen over the Bird Bash weekend.

If the American Robin was the ultimate sign of spring finally arriving, the most exciting bird seen was the Tundra Swan, 16 of them waiting for the ice to melt! They were first spotted by Therez Violette on Lake Nipissing at the end of Nipissing Street in Sturgeon Falls (see photo below) and subsequently seen by Dick Tafel, Luke Stephenson and Renee Levesque during the Bird Bash. Not often do we get to see Tundra Swans migrating to their breeding grounds in the Arctic, never mind 16 of them!



In addition to the American Robin, another thrush seen was the Hermit Thrush, in Laurier Woods and on the college trails and surrounding area.



Six species of sparrows were seen: the Song, the White-throat, the American Tree, the Chipping, the Swamp and the handsome Fox Sparrow on its way north (seen at left). Renee had 7 Fox Sparrows in her yard digging up the leaves under her lilac trees, and Nicole Richardson saw 14 on one of the university trails. The Swamp was seen in Laurier Woods atop the cattails.

Both Kinglets were seen, the Ruby-crowned and the Golden-crowned.

The Eastern Phoebe was seen by a few and a pair is nesting at Ken Gowing's.

The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker has arrived to join the other woodpeckers seen – the Hairy, the Downy, the Pileated, and Gary Sturge's **very own Stillaway Line Black-backed**.

Lori Anderson saw the Eastern Bluebird in mid-April in her Chisholm Township area and has had the Eastern Meadowlark since.

Therez had the male Northern Cardinal at her feeder in Sturgeon Falls.

Other passerines included the Evening Grosbeaks, the last of the season's Common Redpolls, Black-capped Chickadees, Brown Creepers, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Purple Finches and Blue Jays.

Both Lori and Gary saw Tree Swallows (one at right), and Lori saw Barn Swallows.

Many saw Sandhill Cranes in West Nipissing and in Chisholm Township, and the Great Blue Heron was spotted in many different areas.

Most shorebirds had yet to arrive, although Dick, Luke and Renee saw the Greater Yellowleg on



Lake Nipissing while looking for the Tundra Swans, and Renee saw a Wilson's Snipe in West Nipissing at the side of the road. It was a great view of the Wilson's Snipe and provided an excellent opportunity for a photograph (see below) which subsequently appeared on the OFO website.



Many interesting ducks were seen, many in large ponds in farmers' fields, some at Callander Lagoon and others in Lake Nipissing as they waited for the ice to melt. Perhaps the most interesting was the Northern Pintail (below) seen by Dick in a large field pond in West Nipissing and by Brent Turcotte at the mouth of Chippewa Creek. Other ducks seen were the American Wigeon, the Gadwall, the Bufflehead, the Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal, Common Goldeneye, Lesser Scaup, and the most numerous of all the ducks this month, the Ring-necked.



Both the Red-necked and Pied-billed Grebes were seen, the Red-necked by Monique in the Sturgeon River and the Pied-billed by Renee, Dick and Luke at Cache Bay.

Cormorants, Ring-billed and Herring Gulls and a Caspian Tern were also seen, the latter at Cache Bay. The Common Loon was seen by Craig Hurst in Trout Lake, by Lori in Graham Lake in Chisholm Township, and by Dick, Luke and Renee at Cache Bay.

Belted Kingfishers (one below) have also returned and were seen by a few.



Kestrels (one below) have returned in full force and were seen in West Nipissing and Chisholm Township on hydro wires and hovering over fields in their hunt for food.



The Cache Bay, Sturgeon River and Lakeshore Exit, Ospreys have returned to their former nests.

No one reported seeing a Red-tailed Hawk, but that was probably only because there were so many April birds to report that the Red-tailed got neglected. The Bald Eagle, now seemingly numerous in Nipissing, was seen by Kaye Edmonds in Chisholm Township, and by others at Cache Bay where there are often three juveniles seen.

There were two exciting finds for Jim Hassler in April. He saw the Great Gray Owl in the airport area, an owl not reported at Bird Wing meetings since heard by Ken and Lori at Marten River in February. Jim also saw the Snow Goose on Lake Nipissing near the old Chief Commanda. It was with the many Canada Geese seen by the hundreds in many places.

**Great Canadian Birdathon:** Further to March's summary, Dick explained in greater detail that he would like to raise money to be used towards erecting an Ontario Heritage Plaque at Pimisi Bay to honour Louise de Kiriline Lawrence. To this end, he hopes to get \$2,000.00 in donations to send to Bird Studies Canada. Of that amount, 25 percent can be designated to an organization devoted to environmental issues, like the Nipissing Naturalist Club or Laurier Woods. **It is still not too late to donate to Dick or to Fred Pinto either online or in person.** A tax receipt is sent by Bird Studies Canada to everyone who donates more than \$10.00.

By the time you read this summary, you may have already participated in the Great Canadian Birdathon like the happy birders below – Matt, Dick and Lori.



**Owl Prowl:** The April Nocturnal Owl Survey is now over, with some interesting results. The first group out in very early April was the Doug Pattersons who have the Mattawa route down to Papineau Lake. Doug's explanation of the route was right out of an Edgar Allan Poe story: The lake was frozen, the snow was deep, a bright moon lit up the old growth forest, a "wolf" crossed the frozen lake, the world was silent when out of that silence was heard two Barred Owls. It was enough to make your hair stand on end! And if that wasn't enough, one of the Barred Owls flew back and forth across the road and jumped in and out of the tall pines for the rest of the stop. Doug had to stop playing the tape to prevent over-stressing the owl. In the meantime, the Barred Owl that had been visiting the Patterson feeders on a daily basis waited on the roof for them to return and flew off once it saw they arrived home safely.



Also out early in April were Lori and Ken. The weather conditions were perfect for them – calm and clear with no frog croakings and peepings to interfere with the hootings. However, they heard only two Barred Owls. As Lori puts it, "The two responded well to the recordings as if they had not seen a friend all winter!" They saw only one America Woodcock and heard none peenting. In past years, they have had up to 20 Woodcocks. But it was a chilly April this year, especially early in April, and that no doubt kept the Woodcocks away.

Subsequent to the Owl Prowl, Lori heard a Great Horned Owl (seen at right).

In mid-April, Gary and Connie Sturge did both their routes. The evening of their first route, the weather was



*supposed* to be conducive. But despite what the Weather Network reported, the temperature dropped from plus 1 to minus 3. And it wasn't just cold: at station one, light rain; at station three, ice pellets; at station four, snow! And the wind came up. If Gary and Connie didn't like the conditions, well, neither did the owls. Only one Barred Owl responded.

However, conditions were much better two nights later when Gary and Connie completed their second route. With no wind, sleet or rain seven Barred Owls responded, three flying to trees nearby and one perching in a bush near the road. They also heard a Great Horned Owl and a Northern Saw-whet Owl. A great night for Gary and Connie that made up for the dismal night two nights before!

Out in late April were Dick with Luke Stephenson and Matt Walter. They experienced a few technical difficulties when the tape got stuck on pause – Cal Osborne you were missed! – but that did not prevent them from hearing eight Barred Owls on their McConnell Lake route out towards Temiskaming. They heard lots of American Woodcocks and one performed its aerial ballet right in front of them! This was Matt's first time seeing this display, as well as his first time on the owl prowl, so a great night for Matt!

Matt reports that when they first arrived in the area, Hermit Thrushes were singing and Common Loons could be heard in the distance. Wonderful spring sounds to begin what proved to be a productive night.

And finally out on April 29 were Craig and Elaine Hurst who cover an area from the airport to Four Mile Lake and into Feronia. It is a more populated area than most of the other areas, so playing recordings close to homes can be a bit dicey. However, as Craig says, "Hopefully people think they are just hearing owls!" They heard two Barred Owls, a Wilson's Snipe, an American Woodcock, and the drumming of a Ruffed Grouse.

Gary's group heard the most and experienced the worst weather conditions. Dick's group was a close second in terms of owls heard. Doug's group was the most dramatic. And Lori's and Craig's groups, well, better luck next year in terms of owls heard or seen!

We anxiously await the results of Gary and Connie's Woodcock Singing-ground Survey, undertaken between April 20 and May 20 each year.

**Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program:** This is a long-term monitoring program launched in 1995 by Bird Studies Canada throughout the Great Lakes basin, with financial support from Environment Canada, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Great Lakes Protection Fund. It is designed to collect information about the presence and abundance of birds and amphibians in Great Lakes coastal and inland marshes. Amphibian surveys are conducted three times between April and July 5, and marsh bird surveys, conducted two times between mid-May and early July.



Marsh birds in our area include the Least Bittern (above), the American Bittern, the Virginia Rail, the Sora, the American Coot, the Common Moorhen and the Pied-billed Grebe.

Craig and Elaine Hurst monitor two locations within Laurier Woods. They did their first amphibian survey evening of May 5 and found healthy activities in both locations of the Spring Peepers.

There may be some areas open in Nipissing. If interested, contact Kathy Jones, Ontario Volunteer Coordinator, Bird Studies Canada. Her number and email address and information about this important survey can be found at

<http://www.bsc-eoc.org/volunteer/glmp/index.jsp?targetpg=glmpbird>



**Canadian Lakes Loon Survey:** Volunteers are also needed to monitor loons and lake health, an ongoing survey since 1981 when there were signs that our iconic bird whose haunting call fills our northern lakes was in decline. This survey takes up little of one's time. All you need to do is visit a lake at least three times – once in June to see if there are loons on territory; once in



July to see if chicks hatch; and once in August to see if the chicks lived long enough to fledge. If interested, visit the website at <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/volunteer/cills/index.jsp?lang=EN> and/or contact Kathy Jones at Bird Studies Canada.

**Warblers:** Dick talked about the various wood warblers we can expect to see in May and as we are now almost at the end of May, many of these beautiful little warblers have been seen in Laurier Woods and in the woods in the Nipissing and Parry Sound districts. **Instead of listing these warblers of which most of you know the names, on the next three pages is a photographic warbler collage. Photographs are by Matt Walter and Renee Levesque.**

Marc Buchanan provided a report on the tiny Blackpoll Warbler which makes “one of the most extraordinary migratory feats on the planet.” It migrates, without stopping, from its northeastern homes in a straight line over the Atlantic Ocean all the way to South America, a distance of 2,270 to 2,770 km. And it does this in two to three days! Most songbirds migrate over land, not over water like gulls, because landing on water would be fatal for them.

Researchers made this discovery by placing very tiny geolocators, weighing half a gram, on the backs of the Blackpolls. Scientists want to learn more about where migratory songbirds spend the winter so they can begin to examine and address what might be causing declines in migratory songbirds, Blackpolls included.

**Bird Bash:** May’s Bird Bash took place over a 24-hour period weekend of May 23 and 24. Be sure and get your results to Dick by the evening of the 25th at the latest.

**Bird Wing:** The next Bird Wing meeting is a field outing to look for warblers and other birds in Laurier Woods. Meet in the parking lot of the Visitors' Centre or at Laurier Woods main parking lot at **6:30 PM on Tuesday, May 26**. Bring a bug jacket and/ or bug spray in case of any pesky black flies, although Dick is adamant there are no black flies in Laurier Woods - perhaps because the warblers have eaten them? After our walk through Laurier Woods, we will head out to Main Street West to see the 500 or so Chimney Swifts make their balletic descent down one chimney.

*Text: Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe*

*Photos: Renee Levesque unless otherwise indicated on the photo. Special thank you to Matt Walter for his many wonderful photos, with apologies for cutting off part of his name on the Chestnut-sided photos, but technical difficulties prevented me from fixing that. It’s a long story!*

*Spring would not be spring without seeing the lovely wood warblers that come our way, some to stay, some migrating through. Photographs of some can be viewed on the next three pages.*





Photos by Matt Walter



Matt  
Walter



Matt  
Walter

