

# Bird Wing Report

October 24, 2017

*By Renee Levesque; photos as indicated*

At the last minute when we thought we would have no place to meet and a daytime outing was in the works instead, the Bird Wing group ended up meeting in the Board Room of the North Bay Public Library after all. It's a long story!

As often happens, especially when we meet in the Board Room, the discussion was passionate. It was a fun meeting, with some controversies – the way it is sometimes with birders!

So many birds had been seen during October that I, as Bird Wing Scribe, sort of panicked thinking how I would ever get this report done with so many species to list. However, I managed even if the report is somewhat late.

## **Birds Seen:**

**Brent Turcotte:** In early and mid-October, Brent went walking through the beaver meadow and wetlands off Sand Dam Road and saw a Black-backed Woodpecker and a great clear view of the Winter Wren. This may be one of the few times someone has beaten Gary Sturge in being the first to see the Black-backed! We should consider having Brent take us along this route next fall for a Bird Wing outing.

**Peter Ferris:** While hiking in the La Vase River area, Peter saw the Great Blue Heron (right) and the Pileated Woodpecker and got some great photos of both. Seems there have been a fair number of Great Blue Herons around during the month of October. Brent even saw one where he works, at Value Village!

**Marc Buchanan:** Dark-eyed Juncos arrived in Marc's yard in October, with the White-breasted Nuthatch and the



*Peter Ferris*

Mourning Dove, both of which Marc gets in his yard on a regular basis. Like many of us who have feeders, Marc enjoys watching his backyard birds. One can learn so much about their behaviour from observing them that closely.

Ken Gowing: Ken always gets some interesting birds around his place. Recently, it was a Red-tailed Hawk (below) and a continuing American Woodcock! Seems there have been quite a few sightings of the Red-tailed as it moves south. For Ken's other birds, read below what Lori Anderson reported.



*Renee Levesque*

Lori Anderson: Lori heard the Great Horned Owl at Ken's place, an owl Peter wants badly to photograph, so let him know if you see one and where. Lori may have been the first to see American Tree Sparrows this fall, again at Ken's place.



In her own yard where she also does some birding, Lori was still getting many American Pipits (left), up to 100! Many others have seen pipits, although not in Lori's numbers. They seem to be more numerous this year and seen in a variety of places.

Gary Sturge: Near his home in the Powassan area, Gary saw a late Broad-winged Hawk. Most had already migrated, but as with any species, there are a few stragglers and this year maybe more than most other years because of the exceptionally warm October weather. Gary also

*Renee Levesque*

saw a Sharp-shinned Hawk and some of us got a good look at one at Sunset Park.

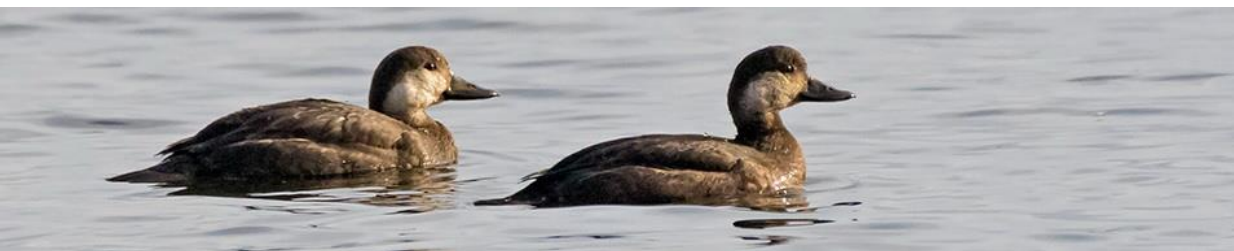
Connie Sturge: Not to be out-done by Gary, Connie saw some Bald Eagles. Nothing unusual about that these days, but Connie saw two by her house and one in her very own backyard - not flying overhead, but actually sitting in her yard as you will see in the photo at right!

Connie saw three Gray Jays on Hummel Line. Brent also saw one during his Sand Dam hike. (The mention of Gray Jays resulted in a lively discussion about what bird should be Canada's National Bird if the government were ever to decide we should have one!)

Dick Tafel: Dick saw all three scoters at Sunset Park – the Black, the Surf and the aptly-named White-winged. They are not easy to identify without a scope and even with a scope in choppy water, it can still be difficult. Scoters are dark, stocky, diving sea ducks that breed in the far north. The scoters are usually seen in small numbers at Sunset Park in the fall, although last year Marc saw a male White-winged Scoter in early August, and Dick and I saw a male in the spring two years ago on Lake Nipissing by Queen Street. Two female Black Scoters with their light cheeks and five White-winged Scoters landing on Lake Nipissing at Sunset Park are seen in the photos below. (Zoom in on the White-wings to see their white wings.)



*Gary Sturge*



*Stephen O'Donnell*

Renee Levesque: After Stephen O'Donnell posted on ontbirds his sighting at Sundridge Lagoon of three Canvasback Ducks, I was able to get there to see these imperious and elegant ducks before they headed south. And after Kaye Edmonds alerted birders, I saw a few Lapland Longspurs at Sunset Park. (A male in non-breeding colours is seen at right.)

To read more about the Canvasback Duck and Lapland Longspur, see *The Woodland Observer*, "Interesting fall finds", <https://www.nipnats.com/>, pages 14-17.

**Other Birds Seen:** After we listed our 2 or 3 birds, it was then a free-fall of many other birds seen. Here are some:

Sparrows: During October's Bird Bash, Lori saw the Chipping Sparrow, a fairly late sighting for this little sparrow, and she saw White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows up to the time of the meeting. Others also saw White-crowns, but there did not seem to be as many seen as other years.

A few saw the Fox Sparrow – I believe Brent did on his Sand Dam hike, and I know Kaye Edmonds did in Laurier Woods.



Renee Levesque



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I saw a late Savannah Sparrow on one of the West Nipissing Roads, and some of us saw the odd Song Sparrow.

Warblers: Lori was also still seeing the odd Yellow-rumped Warbler up to October 22, although many other warblers were seen during October's Bird bash, particularly by Gary and Connie – Pine, Palm and Black-throated Green.

Blackbirds: In early October, at least a hundred Rusty Blackbirds (left) were seen by some of us in Laurier Woods. Quite a sight!

Geese: **STOP the PRESSES!!!** Through Mike Burrell, it has come to our attention that the four white geese

Grant McKercher, Dick and I, and perhaps others, saw on Osprey Links during the first week or so of October were not Snow Geese, but Ross's Geese. They look like Snow Geese, but, in fact, they are even rarer in our area. The Ross's Goose, also an Arctic goose, has a shorter neck and a rounder head than the Snow Goose. It also has a stubbier bill with a blue-gray or purple-blue base, with warts at the bill base, although these can be difficult to see.

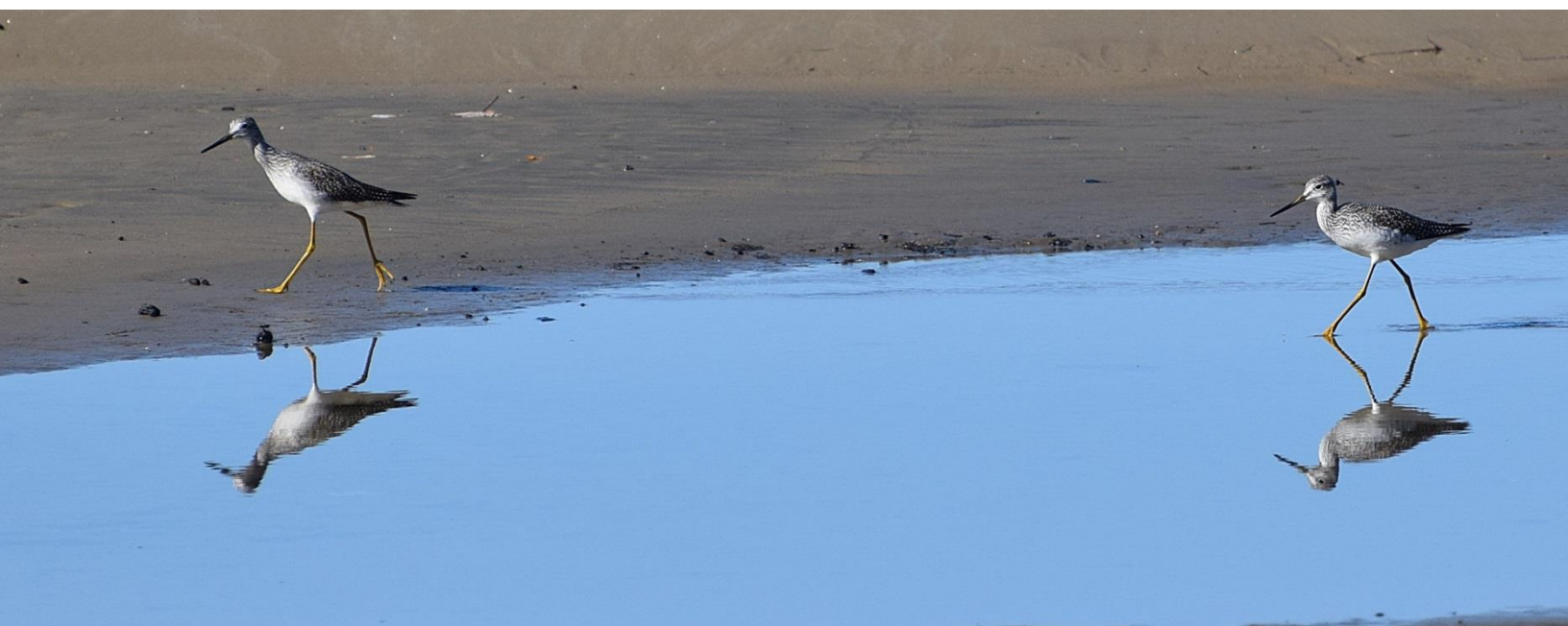


Grant McKercher

(See Grant's photo above.) And the immature Ross's Goose is whiter than the immature Snow Goose.

Canada Geese were seen everywhere, with the odd Cackling Goose, a goose that looks like a Canada Goose but with a smaller head and a stubbier bill. (Yes, Marc, geese with stubbier bills can be discerned!!)

Shorebirds: Black-bellied Plovers were seen along the various Lake Nipissing beaches; two Dunlins were seen at Jocko Point during October's Bird Bash by Dick and me; two Greater Yellowlegs (photo below) were seen at Sunset Park by some; and 14 Pectoral Sandpipers were seen in flight at Verner Lagoon by me. Given the few shorebirds seen to date, it is felt more will be seen in November.



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Ducks: The most numerous duck this month – and it will be numerous into November too – was the Bufflehead. Other ducks seen: Lesser and Greater Scaup, the latter mostly at Cache Bay in large rafts; Common Goldeneye; Wood Ducks; American Wigeon; the occasional Redhead Duck; and Common and Hooded Mergansers. We should continue to see some of these ducks up until about mid-December and it is hoped some stay around for the Christmas Bird Count.

Coot: American Coots were seen at Cache Bay and at Callander and Warren Lagoons, although not in the numbers of other years.

Grebes: Grebes seen were the Horned Grebe at Sunset Park; the Red-necked at Jocko Point and Cache Bay; and the Pied-billed at Cache Bay where they breed. Some of us saw up to 20 or more Pied-bills.

Loons: Although many of us saw Common Loons, no one saw a particularly large raft of them, other than the 50 seen by Dick and Grant McKercher in September. The adults have now more or less transitioned to their non-breeding plumage.

Sandhill Cranes: Seen by many in the fields of West Nipissing and the Powassan area.

Gulls: Some of us saw the handsome and large Great Black-backed Gull at Sunset Park and other points along the Lake Nipissing shore, and some of us saw the small Bonaparte Gull, also at Sunset Park. At right is a photo showing the adult on the left in non-breeding plumage and a first winter (juvenile) on the right.



Stephen O'Donnell

The Bonaparte is a two-year gull, meaning by next year it will be an adult. All gulls go through a sequence of plumage.

Most smaller gulls transition to adults in their second year; medium-sized gulls, like the Ring-billed, in three years; and large gulls, like the Herring and Great Black-backed, in four years.

Other Raptors: In late October, Dick saw a Northern Harrier at Cache Bay and Lori saw one at her place. Lori also saw an American Kestrel two days prior to our meeting, again at her place.

Turkey Vultures were still being seen by Ken and Lori and Gary and Connie the day of the meeting. Merlins were also seen by Ken and Lori.

Wild Turkeys: A Wild Turkey has been coming to Dick's yard recently – the first time in recent years he has had one at his place. Lori saw 11 of them near her place – and Peter saw one on Lakeshore Drive!!

Swans: Therez Violette was the first to report Tundra Swans in Lake Nipissing off Marleau Road in Sturgeon Falls. These swans were subsequently seen by others, up to about 40 of them.

**Notes from the Field:** Steve Pitt recently had a Sharp-shinned Hawk (right) in his yard harassing nine Blue Jays. The Black-capped Chickadees that had been at Steve's feeder when the hawk arrived were nowhere to be seen, but the Blue Jays stood their ground! Steve reported the jays would either dodge the hawk or follow it back up to its perch in the high branches and sit on the next branch over, raucously jaying away. Steve spent a half hour watching this, but because he could not linger longer, he didn't find out whether the hawk gave up in frustration or got itself a Blue Jay.



Steve Pitt

I checked out Cooper's vs. Blue Jays online and found this interesting blog entitled, "Why You Should Love Blue Jays at Your Feeders",

<http://tailsofbirding.blogspot.ca/2009/05/why-you-should-love-blue-jays-at-your.html>.

(And, as I had to do with the Snowball video, I will check with the regular attendees to determine if they read it!)

**Project FeederWatch:**

Project FeederWatch gets underway on **November 11** and all serious birders are asked to take part in this worthwhile citizen-science project. Those wishing to do so must first join Bird Studies Canada at an annual individual membership fee of \$35.00, or an annual household membership fee of \$50.00. (Student annual membership fee is \$25.00.) By joining, you are also entitled to BirdWatch Canada newsletter and monthly eNews. For more information on Project FeederWatch, see,

<http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/pfw/> - and be sure to watch the video featuring a feeder watcher and Kerrie Wilcox, Project FeederWatch Leader, Bird Studies Canada.

**Christmas Bird Count:** Our Christmas Bird Count takes place on **Saturday, December 16**, with Lori acting once again as our compiler. Lori will have the data recording books for all team leaders at the next Bird Wing meeting on November 27, **so all team leaders should attend the meeting, and if you can't make it, then be sure one member of your team is in attendance.**

Please contact Lori if you wish to take part in the Count, either as part of a team or a feeder watcher from your own backyard. You can email Lori at [lori.anderson58@hotmail.com](mailto:lori.anderson58@hotmail.com) or call her at, 705-724-5780.



*Renee Levesque*



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### Show and Tell, Art on

**Cider:** For Show and Tell, Lori brought a can of Collective Arts Apple and Cherry Cider (brewed in Hamilton by Collective Arts Brewing) with the art on the can done by Amanda Burk, artist and Associate Professor, Nipissing University, Fine and Performing Arts. I am not promoting the cider available at the LCBO, but rather Ms. Burk's art work and the raven drawing on the can



in particular. For more information on Amanda Burk see

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amanda\\_Burk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amanda_Burk), or <http://www.amandaburk.com/Default.aspx>, and if you click on Portfolio on Ms. Burk's website, you can see more of her wildlife art work, some of which is of birds, including the drawing on the can of cider. The good thing about art work on cider cans is that it promotes artists and their works to those who may not have been aware there are some wonderful artists in our midst.



Renee Levesque

**Gulls:** Although there are Herring and Ring-billed Gulls around by the hundreds, we are waiting to see the Arctic Gulls, the Glaucous and the Iceland (left) in particular. And so to that end, we will again make our annual trip to **Merrick Landfill Site on Saturday, December 2.** Details will be available at the November meeting.

We should also see many Bald Eagles at the landfill site, maybe a hawk or two and some Snow Buntings. Some hope for a Lesser Black-backed, but I am

skeptical one will put in an appearance. Still, who knows?

Now that Thayer's has been lumped in with the Iceland Gull, we thankfully no longer have to go through trying to determine which is which – unless, of course, you are into identifying sub-species.

**Bird Bash:** The next Bird Bash will take place the **weekend of December 2 and 3.**

**Bird Wing Meeting:** The next Bird Wing meeting will be held in the auditorium of the North Bay Public Library on **Tuesday, November 28, starting at 6:30 p.m.**

There are some who would like to return to the 7 p.m. start time, but keep the 6:30 start time if there is a speaker or special presentation. It means we could not dilly-dally and socialize after the meeting to the same extent because, as you well know, the janitor wants us out of the building before 9 p.m. This will be discussed at November's meeting, as well as the Christmas Bird Count and a possible Eastern Bluebird project at Lori's.



Those who say that some people “eat like a bird”, clearly have had no experience with Blue Jays at their feeders!  
-Borrowed loosely from David J. Beard (1947–2016)