

# Bird Wing Report

## July 24, 2018

*By Renee Levesque and contributors; photos as indicated*

### **Outing:**

After meeting in the parking lot of the former Sears – a first that needs to be noted for historical purposes – seven of us made our way to Callander Lagoon to find out what shorebirds were stopping over. The seven included a visitor from Calgary who had many firsts other than meeting in the former Sears parking lot – first birding expedition and first lagoon visit.

Shortly after we arrived at the lagoon, it started to rain, but that did not deter the Magnificent Seven, although the biting insects were a bit of a nuisance. The rain did not last long and soon the sun was out and it was hot and close once again.

At first there did not appear to be many shorebirds, but shorebirds have a way of surprising one. Suddenly there they are, flying in sync high and low over one of the cells, taking their time landing, or popping out from behind the vegetation and muddy mounds. And this is exactly what happened at Callander Lagoon. Photo below shows Least Sandpipers in flight.



*Renee Levesque*

Thanks to Dick Tafel and Grant McKercher and their scopes, we were all able to get good views of 3 Lesser Yellowlegs, about 20 to 30 Least Sandpipers, 5 or 6 Semipalmated Sandpipers, 9 Killdeer, 3 or 4 Semipalmated Plovers, 1 Pectoral Sandpiper and 1 Baird's Sandpiper.

In both cells were about 30 to 40 Canada Geese, many young ones. When we took a walk over to the third cell, they led the way! Also seen in the cells were one American Black Duck and many Mallards and Wood Ducks with their young. A group of Mallard young is pictured below.



*Renee Levesque*

Red-winged Blackbirds and Song Sparrows with their young were numerous. A couple of Common Yellowthroats could be heard *witchety-witchety-witchetying*. A Great Blue Heron flew overhead; a lone Tree Swallow was catching insects; American Robins were perched on the wires; and a Pileated Woodpecker was heard drilling. The photo below is of a juvenile male Red-winged Blackbird skimming the surface for insects.

A bird outing is not complete without seeing an animal or two and this lagoon outing did not disappoint. We saw a White-tailed Deer and a Groundhog, both bound to be seen at Callander Lagoon, especially the Groundhog.

We then made our way to the nearest Tim Horton's for drinks, eats, story-telling and laughter. It was a nice way to end the day.



*Renee Levesque*

## **Stories from the Field:**



*Common Loon:* From Grant McKercher earlier in July: “I saw a loon acting a little unusual yesterday afternoon – swimming very close to shore and looking under the water the way mergansers do. Usually I see loons much further out in the bay. Later I noticed it had a yellow “tag” on its hind end. It turns out it is a fishing lure caught on its leg. The bird was back today, still with the lure on which was obviously causing it some distress. It doesn’t seem able or willing to dive.” (See Grant’s photo below.)

After Grant sent me the photo, I contacted various birders and Kathy Jones, Bird Studies Canada. Unfortunately the consensus was that not much could be done unless the loon came ashore and was weak enough to catch.



*Grant McKercher*

From Kathy Jones: “If you go to Ontario Wildlife Rescue you will find what options are in your area. However, I’m afraid your options will be limited. Loons dive, swim and fly better than we do even with a lure attached. Catching them is difficult and is usually done at night and most rehabbers won’t have the resources - multiple boats, D nets and jack lights. I would not recommend the inexperienced catching loons. Sadly, as is often the case with this species, you may have to wait until it is ill before you can catch it. When loons are very ill, they will often come onto the beach. Let me know how things progress. I am sorry that I don’t have better news to share.”

Grant has not seen the loon since, so whether the fishing lure came off its leg somehow, we don’t know. It is so very unfortunate when this happens, especially with loon numbers in decline.

*Broad-winged Hawks:* Janet and Lloyd Sparks who live near Wolfe Lake were fortunate enough this spring to have a pair of Broad-winged Hawks nest near their home. The male and the female build the nest together, typically 25 to 40 feet above the ground, although Janet estimates theirs is about 60 feet above the ground.

Initially, Janet and Lloyd thought there was one young, but on July 22, discovered there were actually two. And then during the morning of July 28, they saw them out of their nest for a period of time, sitting on a branch. Then at noon that same day, they saw them take their first test flight. Janet says, "They flew in a big circle over the bush and back to the nest while an adult remained on guard." At the right is a photo Lloyd took of the two young on July 22.



*Lloyd Sparks*

The Broad-winged Hawk, a small, chunky buteo, breeds in deciduous forest or mixed coniferous deciduous forest, often near water and near clearings or edges. Usually one to two eggs are laid, after which the female incubates them for 28 to 31 days. The male brings her food during this period and he will incubate the eggs while she eats.

Once the young are hatched, the female remains with them almost constantly for one to two weeks. The male brings the food and the female feeds the nestlings. The young are able to climb out of the nest and perch on a nearby branch at four to five weeks. They begin to fly at five to six weeks, after which time they learn to hunt.

The Broad-winged Hawk migrates in the fall to Central and South America. It migrates in huge, spectacular flocks.

Broad-winged pairs sometimes reuse their nests from previous years or renovate old nests of other species, so Janet and Lloyd may have the pair back next year.

*Wild Turkey:* From Lori Anderson who recently found 11 Wild Turkey eggs in a field on her farm: "The turkey hen and a turkey tom have been seen foraging in various fields on the home farm off and on all year. Rarely have the two have been seen together, only once or twice earlier in the summer.





*Lori Anderson*

“The hen sitting on the nest was discovered on July 26, although we don’t know for how long she has been sitting – 28 days is the total. The nest is about 15 feet from the dairy goat barn and about 100 feet from the house! It is simply a clutch of eggs on the ground in the long grass. (See Lori’s photo at left.) Graham, my son, was on the skid steer heading to the side of the barn to load some hay bales onto a pallet, bales which he would be dropping from the mow. Luckily, he brought the skid steer to the site before dropping the bales and in doing so, saw the turkey just moments before

driving over the nest – the nest would have been crushed by the hay bales. The grass is tall and we had had no cause to travel in that location thus far in the season. We have not entered the area since and I have avoided cutting the long grass in my ‘after haying yard clean-up’.

“I saw the hen leave the nest during the afternoon of July 28. She was flying low over my head beside the house, landing very close by in a field to forage. So she is still keeping house. Despite the nest’s close proximity to human disturbances, we feel it has an advantage of protection from ravens and coyotes, but hope raccoons don’t stumble upon it.”

*Trumpeter Swan:* For those who recall my article in *The Woodland Observer* on Ava the Trumpeter Swan, tagged as L95, she has returned to Cache Bay behind the trailer park. I first became aware of this when I received an email from Bev Kingdon on July 18, forwarding me an email from Kathleen Thorne who reported L95 behind her place off Fort Road. Kathleen reported at the time, “Last fall we had one here for an extended period – a month or more and we saw it near enough every day. We have an 8-year-old male Chesapeake Bay retriever, Bruno, who does a lot of tolling and the swan was very friendly with him and with me when I would swim. Didn’t seem frightened at all. The swan would come out whenever the dog was in the water and come up quite close – within 5m – of the dog. They were buddies.” Ava didn’t have her wing tags last fall, so we are assuming, given Ava’s location then, that it was Ava that Kathleen saw.

So late one afternoon on July 20, off John and I went to Cache Bay to find Ava. We planned to go to Kathleen’s who graciously invited me out to her place to have a look, but first we stopped by Ava’s old haunt, Cache Bay behind the trailer park. We were about to leave after half an hour

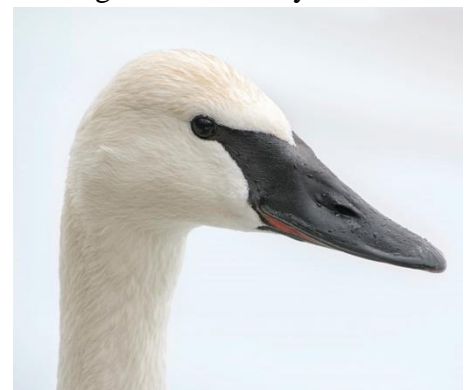
of looking when suddenly she appeared far out in the Bay and then spent another half hour grooming herself on a distant shore. Finally, she must have felt the need for corn and in she quickly came to the trailer park dock where I had fed her last August. After ascertaining with binoculars it was indeed Ava now that she has her L95 wing tags, we made our way to the trailer park and were immediately recognized by the people we met there last year – Bill and Diana from Sturgeon Falls and Tom and Judy from near Windsor. Photo of Ava below is by the trailer park dock.



*Renee Levesque*

Bill is especially devoted to Ava and calls her Sweetie. He is feeding Ava corn, and as I was a bit concerned that she was being fed so early in the summer when the Bay must surely be full of good nutritious food. I emailed Bev about this and she reported that although natural food all summer is very good for Ava, a bit of corn helps with being able to save her if she gets caught up in fishing gear or lead poisoning. However, it must be whole corn and it must be untreated and it must not sit in the pail uneaten, getting mouldy and mildewed. Mould and mildew can cause aspergillosis, swan pneumonia, resulting in death. (Bev also emailed Bill, informing him of this.)

I also heard from Coleen Spatafora, the grandmother of Ava, the baby whom Ava the Swan was named in honour of. Coleen told me she saw Ava at LaSalle Park in Burlington in February – the photo she took of Ava then is at right - and has since been “eagerly awaiting any sightings – and today’s sighting brought much joy.” Coleen calls Ava “quite the madam” - and that she is! We all wish she had a mate. Maybe next year.



*Coleen Spatafora*



And then, through Bev, I heard from Peter Foisy, formerly of Callander, who asked permission to put Ava's story, the one I wrote for the October 2017 issue of *The Woodland Observer*, on his Facebook page. I gave him permission, provided he also mention Nipissing Naturalists Club, which he did. The Ava fan club is growing!

## **Birds and Heat:**

Birds have a higher body temperature than most other creatures – 40 degrees Celsius on average, and they have a high metabolic rate and lead an active lifestyle, leading to even more body heat. They get hot and can even overheat when there is a lengthy heat spell as we have had so far this summer. So how do birds manage to maintain a healthy body temperature? First of all, their respiration rate is rapid, increasing the air flow and affording greater heat dissipation. Secondly, the bare skin patches on their legs, feet and face enable them to lose heat.

Birds do not have sweat glands so they are unable to dissipate heat by perspiring. Instead, they pant through their open mouth as the American Robin is doing in the photo at right.



*Renee Levesque*

The activity level of passerines decreases during the hottest part of the day. They look for food in the early morning and in the evening. They also seek shade, low to the ground or near water sources. Birds of prey, on the other hand, may start soaring to take advantage of the cooler air at higher altitudes.

Birds will spread or puff out their feathers and flutter their wings in an attempt to circulate the air to their skin. And often you will see birds in the heat sit on the cool grass or in a bird bath holding their wings away from their body. This helps to lower their body temperature.

Birds will also seek out bird baths and the ones which live in water will dive more frequently. A bird bath positioned well; shady areas in a yard; and a feeder during prolonged heat spells will provide some help. My bird baths were very popular spots for young and old alike, especially after the nestlings were fledged. (A feeder during heat spells helps the birds conserve their energy when looking for food.)

## Tips for keeping Birds Healthy and Safe:

Below are tips reprinted from Bird Studies Canada on keeping birds healthy and safe.

Gardening with *native plants* provides habitat and food sources for birds. Oak, cherry, plum and willow trees host caterpillars that birds feed to their young. Goldenrod, asters and sunflowers produce seeds that birds will eat.

Don't be too tidy. Let some flower heads go to seed to feed the birds. Leave a brush pile in the corner, and when it is safe to do so, leave dead trees standing – both provide shelter for birds.

Check carefully for nests before you prune bushes, trees and hedges.

Keep your bird baths full to help birds in hot weather. See photo below of two Blue Jays enjoying a bath.



*Renee Levesque*

Humid weather creates the potential for birdseed to go mouldy, so do your best to keep seed dry if you feed birds in the summer. “No-melt” varieties of suet are available. However, put suet in a shady spot and take it down in extreme heat.

[Clean feeders](#) and bird baths at least every two weeks with a dilute bleach solution – one part bleach to nine parts water. If you see [sick feeder birds](#) or signs of disease are reported in your area, take your feeders down until winter.



Cats roaming freely outside are a leading cause of wild bird mortality. Harness walking and “catios” allow cats to enjoy the outdoors under human supervision – safer for the cat and for the birds. Providing toys for cats to “hunt” indoors is another safe option.

Before peak fall migration is a great time to take action to prevent bird collisions at your home or cottage. [Find out how](#) to make windows and other glass surfaces like balcony railings safer for birds. (By the way, FLAP Canada did eventually get back to me regarding mullioned windows that Doug Patterson recommended at one of our meetings. They help, but there are much better ways to prevent bird collisions. Be sure to click on the link to find out how to make windows safe for birds. One of the items listed reminds me of Ken Gowing. He and Lori will know which one!)

Use binoculars or long camera lenses to see birds up close without disturbing them. Give waterbirds a wide berth when you are boating; stay back from shorebird flocks when they stop to rest during migration; and keep pets on a leash at the beach.

Be sure to click on all the above links underlined in blue for more information.

## Global Big Year:

Some of us who use eBird took part in the Global Big Year on May 5, helping set a world record. Reports came in from almost 30,000 eBirders for a total of 6,924 species worldwide. That means 2/3rds of the world’s birds were seen in 24 hours!



*Weaver Watch, figure by Mackworth*

The most remarkable species reported was the Endangered Ibadan Malimbe (*Malimbus ibadanensis*), pictured at left. It is endemic to Nigeria and a new species for eBird for all-time. It was reported by Adewale Awoyemi from Nigeria. He saw 96 species in just over 4 hours and just over 11 km in the IITA Forest Reserve and Lake, Oyo, Nigeria. To see his list, click on: <https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S45306774>.

The next Global Big Day for eBirders is **Saturday, October 6.**

## Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada:

At the April meeting of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, six bird species were reassessed. I will make mention of the three we see in our area – Chimney Swift, Common Nighthawk and Olive-sided Flycatcher.

Chimney Swift remains as Threatened as it was when first assessed in 2007, “although urban roost counts in recent years offer some signs of hope.” Urban monitoring, such as that done through Bird Studies Canada’s SwiftWatch, should help “provide a clearer overview of trends for the next time this species is reassessed.”

The number of Chimney Swifts seen at the one location on Main Street West in North Bay should be available to me soon and those numbers will be itemized in September's *The Woodland Observer* and summarized in September's Bird Wing report.

Common Nighthawk and Olive-sided Flycatcher were assessed as Threatened in 2007 because of steep declines over the previous three generations. However, their declines have slowed over the past decade and given their large populations over extensive ranges, their status has been revised to Special Concern.



*Renee Levesque*

This is the first year in the last few years I have not seen an Olive-sided Flycatcher despite going to all the usual places where I have seen one over the years. Pictured at left is one I saw last June on Beaucage Road. I am hoping that one year I can get a good photo of one. It is not the most colorful bird and I generally see only one at a distance through binoculars or a scope.

Gary and Connie Sturge, along with their daughter, Rachel, and new Bird Winger, young Matt Proconier, (when will you not be called new and young, Matt??) hit the road on June 28 to count

nightjars – Common Nighthawks and Whip-poor-wills. This was their first year doing so following an email calling for volunteers from Kevin Hannah, Population Assessment Biologist, Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment and Climate Change Canada. Because Gary and Connie seem to like these nighttime forays, I knew they would certainly volunteer for one of the routes. In fact, as far as I know, they were the only Bird Wingers to do so. So good for you Gary, Connie, Rachel and young, new Matt! Gary's story will appear in September's issue of *The Woodland Observer* where I hope to provide information on all the surveys some of us took part in this summer. In the meantime, numbers heard by the Sturge team were: 0 Whip-poor-wills and 1 Common Nighthawk.

## **Great Canadian Birdathon:**

It is not too late to donate to Dick Tafel for taking part with his team in the Great Canadian Birdathon held in May. Dick has now raised through online and in-person donations just over \$2,000.00, 20% of which he has asked Bird Studies Canada to donate to Bird Wing. You can donate to Dick online at: <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/bird-studies-canada/p2p/birdathon/team/tafelot/>.

For Jackie Manella who was on the winning Tafel team, it was her first time as a Birdathoner. Her story will also appear in September's *The Woodland Observer*.



## **Bird Bash:**

The next Bird Bash takes place over the **weekend of August 25.**

## **Bird Wing Outing:**

The next Bird Wing outing takes place on **Tuesday, August 28.** Destination as is usual every August is Cache Bay. You will need to have an early supper because we will be **meeting at 6:00 p.m.** instead of 6:30. It gets darker earlier in late August than in late July and last year, as you will see in the photo below, we were almost birding in the dark, sort of like in Bruce Springsteen's song. We will **meet in the parking lot of the former Sear's.**



*Renee Levesque*

Advance Notice: **September's Bird Wing meeting will take place on September 25,** the fourth Tuesday of the month, **starting at 6:30 p.m.** No surprises there, but where it will be held is different – **at Laporte's Nursery on Lakeshore Drive.** The lower level of the library is undergoing construction and the auditorium and boardroom are not available until October. It will be a special meeting in which trophies will be presented to the winning Nocturnal Owl Survey team and the Birdathon team. Special treats will be available. All teams in both surveys did very well and all writers of the owl survey reports did an excellent job.