

# Bird Wing Report



Nipissing Naturalists Club

# Bird Wing Report

## Zoom meeting, November 2021

*Text: Renee Levesque, Bird Wing Scribe*

*Photos: As indicated*

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

I have to start with the Roughed-legged Hawk mentioned by Grant McKercher who saw 2 at Verner Lagoon. And the reason I have to start with that hawk is because Dick Tafel and I saw one hover over Callander Lagoon for a number of minutes. And why is that significant? Because Grant later informed me that it is an eBird record for Callander Lagoon, the first time one was reported there! That doesn't mean one wasn't see there before, but, if so, it was not reported on eBird. Gary Sturge also saw this hawk fly over his house, no doubt on its way to the famed Stillaway Line. You can see Buddy Myles' photo of the Rough-legged later in this report.



The only other hawk mentioned was the Red-tailed (at left) seen by Stephen O'Donnell and it, too, was quite special because it had a metal band on its right leg. Because the entire code is not visible in Stephen's photo, the hawk's history remains unknown. Sometimes a banded Red-tailed also has a plastic coloured band on the opposite leg for easier identification of the code, but Stephen's hawk was without this auxiliary coloured marker.

It is unfortunate the hawk's history could not be traced. It is rather exciting when a bird's history can be, sort of like our tracing our genealogy. I remember how excited Bev Kingdon and I were when we were able to discover that a Trumpeter Swan, seen at Cache Bay, was Bev's special swan named Ava. Because we were able to get a close-up of the code on the metal band, Ava's history became known and what a history it turned out to be! (Ava did not have a large plastic yellow wing-tag with its three-digit code that some banded Trumpeters have for ease of reading, so we had to rely solely on getting a close-up photo of the metal band, no doubt easier to do on a swan that is being fed than on a hawk.)

Stephen's Red-tailed seemed to be a dark-morph Red-tailed and at least one dark-morph Red-tailed was seen by Dick and me on Hwy 17 West near Landfill Site Road, Sturgeon Falls, and possibly another dark morph on Hwy 11 near Wasi Road. The Red-tailed can have quite a difference in colour from the light morph (rufous-coloured) to the dark morph, with a variation of colours between the two.

The other raptor mentioned was the Bald Eagle seen by Sue Gratton and many others. At this time of the year the best place to see many eagles is at the landfill sites. Recently at least 12, ranging from first year to adult, were seen at North Bay's landfill site. Sue's was posing on a log, a nicer sight than those posing on top of garbage!

Lori Anderson was the only one to have seen a Merlin. It shows up on her farm every now and then. Greg Jaski has a Merlin at his place in Beaverton and recently it got a Northern Cardinal. Lori's Merlin goes after her House Sparrows (one seen at right) and if it gets one, those crafty sparrows know to stay out of sight and hide in the barn for a while.



*Buddy Myles*

Greg also has House Sparrows at his place, but then who doesn't have them if they live in the south? Here they are rare, preferring not the city but farms with livestock and the feed store in Verner. Lori reported that when she had no livestock, the sparrows disappeared from her place, but returned again once she acquired livestock. Dick reported that House Sparrows used to be seen at the North Bay train station long ago when freight trains brought cattle through. At one point, Dick reported, 500 were seen during North Bay's Christmas Bird Count.

Worldwide, as Fred Pinto reported, the House Sparrow is in decline. Hence, World Sparrow Day in March whereby House Sparrows are counted around the world. (Here we count all sparrows, including the House Sparrows.

Unfortunately, because I forgot about it, we missed World Sparrow Day this past March.)



*National Audubon Society*

Although not a raptor, the Northern Shrike (photo at left) might as well be one. One was seen by Sheldon McGregor and one by Gary and Connie Sturge during November's Bird Bash. I had not seen one since last winter, but before the week was out following our meeting, one landed on my patio and got a Dark-eyed Junco, a junco I had taken a photo of exactly 5 minutes before. Although seeing these kills is hard on me, it may have been for the best. That morning I wasn't sure the

junco was well. It sat eating in the same spot most of the morning and didn't move when I came out to feed the birds.

There do not seem to be many American Robins left in our area, although Dick up until recently frequently saw small flocks near the mall on Lakeshore Drive.

Rick Tripp now has 4 Northern Cardinals visiting his feeders. Dick has driven to Rick's Callander Bay area numerous times, but has yet to see one of these cardinals. Grant saw one, although he had to wait 2 hours before it appeared. Rick recommends Dick should come at the crack of dawn!

Gary Sturge had the handsome Fox Sparrow (photo at left) in his yard for the last several weeks. I had one that only stayed for a couple of days, and Dick had one that only stayed for the day. It is our opinion that Dick's and mine were one and the same and it flew off to Gary's and stayed. Likes Gary's environment or even Gary better?

No other sparrows, except the House Sparrow, were mentioned, although I am sure many have seen quite a few American Tree Sparrows and some Dark-eyed Juncos. A White-throated Sparrow had been in my yard for most of November and occasionally at April McCrum's.

Connie Sturge had Evening Grosbeaks at her place, as did I – 18 of them on a couple of occasions - and Sue saw two Pine Grosbeaks (photo below.) Lori reported Ken Gowing also had Pine Grosbeaks and I had a couple at my place. Pine Grosbeaks may be in short supply this winter, so it is great to see this handsome bird.



*Renee Levesque*



*Grant McKercher*

Fred Pinto saw both waxwings, the Cedar and the Bohemian. April also saw both recently. Although there seemed to be a good supply of Mountain Ash berries earlier in the fall, Stephen informed us that the robins got to them first because there was a shortage this year of their preferred Wild Raisin. Normally it is a flock or a museum of waxwings one sees, but Stephen saw one in his Sundridge area and Dick and I saw one in Mattawa.

Dick and I saw two Horned Larks (photo at right) on the shores of Lake Bernard and Stephen said a flock is showing up at the ball diamond on Lake Bernard. Lori saw a fair-sized flock of Horned Larks and Snow Buntings in farm fields in the Powassan area. I saw two Snow Buntings at Sunset Park – one graces the cover this month.



*Renee Levesque*

Dick and I saw a flock or drift of them at Centennial Park in Callander and I believe Grant saw them there too. Snow Buntings were mentioned only in passing, so others may have also seen them. They are certainly a lovely-looking bird, as all buntings are. (Thinking here of the Painted Bunting and the Indigo Bunting.)

Stephen has had White-wing Crossbills (photo at right) at his place, and someone, maybe Gary, reported they were seen in the Powassan area. Common Redpolls have also been seen. I had a flock at my place, and following the meeting, Dick and I saw a flock at North Bay's landfill site, and Dick saw a



*Stephen O'Donnell*

flock at his place. Gary saw his flock - guess where – right! – on Stillaway Line. (I don't know if there is a special name for a flock of redpolls.)

Faye Oie waxed poetic about the two Black-capped Chickadees and the Red-breasted Nuthatch she has had at her place – and why wouldn't she. Not only are they cute and friendly and eat out of our hands, but it was these three little birds that were responsible for Faye's buying the house she did in South River. Others have had Red-breasted Nuthatches at their feeders and all of us have had chickadees, a very plentiful bird this fall. Mine can be quite demanding!

Although Canada Geese were around in large numbers, so far this November only one Snow Goose has shown up in North Bay, seen by Grant and Buddy Myles in Amelia Park, and one, a juvenile, showed up at Gary's place on the South River. Lori saw about 7 of them for several days in October near her farm and Sheldon, as mentioned in October's report, saw 8 in West Nipissing in September, one of them a blue morph.

Connie saw Wild Turkeys on Hazel Glen Road and Lori has 12 at her place, down from the 14 she had initially.

Stephen saw 2 interesting gulls, the Iceland (photo at right) and the Glaucous at the Sundridge landfill site. And although Dick and I saw the Iceland on the dock at Lake Bernard, the Iceland and the Glaucous are usually



*Stephen O'Donnell*

found at this time of the year at landfill sites, particularly North Bay's, and days after the meeting, Dick and I saw 2 or 3 of each there. No one mentioned the Great Black-backed Gull, but some have seen both the adult and the juvenile. No doubt we all saw Herring and Ring-billed Gulls.

Greg, Dick and I saw a couple of Red-necked Grebes on Lake Nipissing, and Dick saw a Common Loon on Trout Lake. Earlier in the month, some of us saw rafts of loons of 25 to 31 on Lake Nipissing, all in their winter plumage.

The numerous amounts of American Coots in our area again got mentioned this month. There were at least 50 at Callander Lagoon, 20 at Powassan Lagoon, and Lori saw at least 100 at Cache Bay during the November Bird Bash. What is so incredible about this for some of us is that other years we have been known to spend months trying to find just one!

Some ducks are still around and will be until the larger lakes and rivers freeze, and for those of us whose Christmas Bird Count includes Trout Lake, we hope it doesn't freeze before then. Ducks that were mentioned are itemized in the following paragraphs, but some ducks, like the Green-winged Teal, the Ring-necked Duck, the Common Merganser, and others did not get a mention. In fact, one that should have been mentioned was the Red-breasted Merganser seen by Stephen, Dick and me on Lake Bernard by the dock.

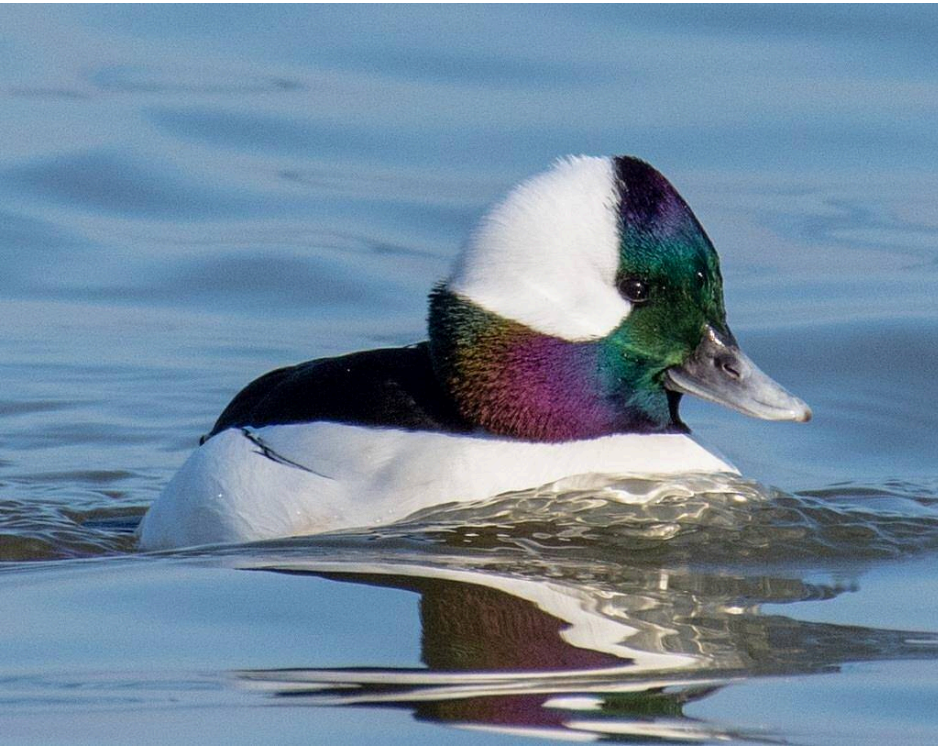
Dick and I were pleasantly surprised to find the Long-tailed Duck (below) on Trout Lake, seen well from the park on Centennial Crescent.



*Stephen O'Donnell*



A few saw the very handsome Hooded Merganser, Sue's favourite duck, but I don't believe anyone saw the Canvasback recently, except Greg who saw hundreds, but outside our circle, at the Beaverton Lagoons, spread out over all 6 cells.



*Buddy Myles*

There were many Common Goldeneye around during November, seen by Fred and some of us. Same with Buffleheads, but for Faye her sighting of them was extra special because it was her first time seeing them since moving to South River. The photo of a male Bufflehead at left taken by Buddy Myles shows how its glossy black head can be lit up like Christmas lights in just the right light and at the right angle.

### **Rare Birds Seen:**

Outside the circle, but significant, nevertheless, are two rare birds seen by members: the Grooved-bill Ani seen by Sheldon near Stratford, and the Cattle Egret seen by Stephen, Dan Burton, April and me, just outside our circle a bit past Dunchurch on Hwy 124.

The Grooved-bill Ani is a cuckoo that is "widespread and common throughout Central America, as far north as Texas. In South America, it primarily occurs west of the Andes; also in inter-Andean valleys and lowlands of northern Colombia and Venezuela." (eBird) The Stratford sighting is the seventh record of it being seen in Canada. Sheldon previously saw one on October 10, 1988, at Bright's Grove Lagoon. What is especially interesting about this bird and what brings it into our

circle is that in 1978, a specimen was found in Sundridge and that specimen is now part of the Royal Ontario Museum's ornithology collection.

You will see from Sheldon's photo below that the Grooved-bill Ani is a blackish bird with a long tail and an unmistakable oversized bill.



There are two other anis. One is the Smooth-billed seen by Dick in Florida some years back. He was fortunate to see one in Florida because its small numbers are in decline there. It is mostly a bird of the Caribbean and South America. There is also the Greater Ani, obviously by its name larger than the other two anis. It lives from Panama and Trinidad and throughout tropical South America to northern Argentina.

The Cattle Egret is not nearly as rare in Ontario as the Grooved-bill Ani, but, nevertheless, did make Mike Burrell's rare bird list: "*Cattle Egret (Parry Sound): One bird was near Dunchruch November 15-16.*" This despite the fact the Cattle

Egret was seen in 11 other places, including Sudbury and Muskoka, the same week it was seen in Dunchurch. And then the next week, one to two Cattle Egrets were seen in 5 places. Dick discovered one at the Optimist Club Field on Wallace Road on October 10, 2018. It stayed for a couple of days and was seen by some of us, either there or at Amelia Park.

The Cattle Egret is a small white heron that prefers fields to water, foraging at the feet of grazing cattle, and often sitting or riding on the backs of cattle eating the ticks they find there. It has a yellow bill that is a brighter yellow during breeding season. Its legs are black in its winter plumage, but in its breeding season, they are yellow. It has a short stocky neck, and in breeding season has buff-coloured plumes on its head and neck. I first saw breeding Cattle Egrets in South Africa and in their breeding plumage with their buff-coloured plumes spread out behind them, they are really quite a handsome bird.

The Cattle Egret is originally from Africa, but can now be found in many countries around the world. It has undergone one of the most rapid and wide-reaching natural expansions of any bird species. (Wikipedia)

Stephen's photo of the Dunchurch egret is below. We couldn't get any closer to get a better photo.



By the way, a couple of days after the meeting, Sheldon also saw a Rufous Hummingbird in Oakville, a feisty west coast hummingbird no doubt seen by those of us who have visited British Columbia, Alaska, the Pacific Northwest, California, or Mexico. Of the western hummingbirds that occasionally show up in the east, the Rufous Hummingbird is the most frequent. (All About Birds)

### **Thunder Cape Bird Observatory:**

In October, Sheldon spent two weeks as a volunteer at Thunder Cape Bird Observatory (TCBO), located east of Thunder Bay at the tip of the Sleeping Giant on Sibley Peninsula, Lake Superior. (This was Sheldon's second visit to the observatory. He also volunteered in September 2019.) Photo of Sheldon and two other volunteers below.



*Courtesy of Sheldon McGregor*

The observatory is operated by Bird Studies Canada in partnership with Thunder Bay Field Naturalists and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry to monitor passerines, waterfowl, raptors and owls. The monitoring includes counting birds and bird banding. Richen Boardman is the master bander and has

been since 2014, travelling by car to and from his home in Nova Scotia twice yearly.

The observatory is located on a busy migratory route that sees up to 300 species of birds and 200 species banded. Hawks and other raptors are attracted by the high cliffs of Sleeping Giant.

In addition to the usual species expected to be seen, a fair number of rarities have also been seen over the years: Violet-green Swallow, Black-throated and Brewer's Sparrows, Bewick's Wren, Painted and Lark Buntings, Sprague's Pipit, Western Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Sulphur-bellied and Ash-throated Flycatchers, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Green-tailed Towhee, Common Ground Dove, Sage Thrasher, Virginia's Warbler, Pacific Loon and Harlequin Duck to name some.



*Sheldon McGregor*

Of the rarities Sheldon saw, was the Yellow-breasted Chat (photo at left) that he saw at the same time as a Boreal Chickadee appeared. He also saw a Harris's Sparrow and some of you may recall the one that appeared at the Chowns' yard a few years back. The Yellow-breasted Chat is a large warbler with quite a repertoire of songs and calls. It is common in its area across much of the United States, but hard to find in its habitat of dense thickets. Listening for it in the spring is the best way to find it.

Thunder Cape is open to hardy visitors from late April to mid-June and then again from late July to early November, but getting to it is not always easy. (It is boarded up the rest of the year.) It is in a fairly inaccessible location by Sleeping Giant Park. As Sheldon

reported, “The closest road near Thunder Cape is at the small village of Silver Islet. From there, if the weather allows, TCBO has a boat which makes trips carefully in the unpredictable waters of Lake Superior. For safety, survival suits must be put on before taking the boat trip. If rain, wind, and/or fog prevent a boat ride (which happened on my exit this trip, as well as on my 2019 trip), you need to hike about 13 km along the shore of Lake Superior over some steep sections, as well as a half-hour stretch over boulder-sized talus from the Sleeping Giant.”

It is preferred that volunteers, who also need to be hardy – long days starting before sunset – spend at least two weeks at the observatory helping out, from counting birds to banding birds and anything in between and even beyond. Sheldon built a roof on the outhouse, a handy person skill that comes in handy so to speak in a remote location. Lodging is provided. (Photo below.)

If you are interested in volunteering, see: <https://www.birdscanada.org/thunder-cape-bird-observatory-volunteer-positions/>.



*Sheldon McGregor*

### **Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas-3 Remote Northern Routes:**

If Sheldon is an intrepid birder, so too is Greg Jaski. As those who join in our Zoom meetings know, Greg lives in Beaverton, a small town on Lake Simcoe at

the mouth of the Beaver River, the same town the famous hockey broadcaster, Foster Hewitt, is from.

Because Greg was raised in North Bay and lived here for 20 years, he spends a lot of time here and in Temagami and Parry Sound. It is near Parry Sound where he and his wife own an off-grid cabin on a motor-free lake, a cabin they have to paddle to.

The Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas-3 is looking for birders to atlas remote Northern Ontario areas. What is needed in particular are teams of four people to canoe northern rivers, especially those that pass through the Hudson Bay Lowlands. See <https://www.birdsontario.org/northern-trips/> for more information or if you wish to volunteer.

Greg has requested Moose River, Albany River, Fawn and Severn River routes. He has completed many wilderness trips throughout the years – canoeing, snowmobiling and

backcountry backpacking in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, some with others, some solo. In Ontario, he has canoed in Algonquin and Killarney Parks and in Temagami where he has lately focused his canoe tripping/exploring. (Photo of Greg at right.)

In New Zealand, Greg has gone on sea kayaking and backpacking trips. He has his Level 11 certificate through the Ontario

Recreational Canoe Association, including a whitewater component.



*Courtesy of Greg Jaski*

If this is not enough, Greg has also taken workshops in wilderness training, animal tracking, and bear awareness, among other workshops and skills training. Oh, and Greg knows his birds – cannot forget that!

It is highly unlikely Greg will have any difficulty securing a route. We look forward to hearing about his remote Atlas-3 trip next year sometime.

### **Callander Lagoon:**

Currently birders are denied access to Callander Lagoon by Callander Council and will be fined if caught trespassing. Grant presented an overview of the lagoon situation and what he, Dick, Fred and Rick have done and are doing to allow access to those of us who belong to Nipissing Naturalists Club. Council is primarily concerned about liability, but our club has group liability insurance and so the solution should seem simple. (As an aside, in 40 years, there have been no liability incidents.)

Callander Lagoon is an important resting and feeding area for a number of species and an area where some species do breed. Since 1990, 165 species have been reported on eBird as being seen at Callander Lagoon, and this year 92 species have been reported, including for the first time the Rough-legged hawk as stated in the first paragraph of this report. (Photos of a hovering Rough-legged is at right.) Quite significant numbers! There may have been even more species this year, but when access is denied, some birds can get missed. (There have been 110 species reported on eBird at Warren





Lagoon, 132 at Verner Lagoon, and 177 at Powassan Lagoon.)

For those not familiar with sewage lagoons as premier birding sites, you might want to read this article: <https://www.bsc-eoc.org/download/BWCsu06.pdf>. Maybe council members might want to read it too.

Following our meeting, Grant reported that he went the lagoon and noticed that the fencing at the main gate had been heightened and reinforced, an area where people had been climbing over the fence. Hard to believe anyone would climb that fence and it certainly hasn't been any Bird Wing regular users – we are too old to be that nimble!

Grant, Dick, Fred or Rick will keep us updated as the situation changes or doesn't change.

Stephen reported that the Sundridge Lagoon closed access this year. The council there is taking the same approach as Callander.

### **Christmas Bird Count (CBC):**

We are getting geared up for North Bay's Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 18, and some for the Burk's Falls CBC on Wednesday, December 15.

If you wish to participate in North Bay's count as a feeder watcher, as long as you



*Renee Levesque*

are within North Bay's CBC 24-km or 15-mile count circle, contact Lori Anderson at [lori.anderson58@hotmail.com](mailto:lori.anderson58@hotmail.com). I believe field observing teams are already in place, but should you wish to join in as a field observer, Lori should be able to find room for you.

If you wish to be part of the Burk's Falls count that extends as far north as Sundridge, contact Martin Parker at [mparker19@cogeco.ca](mailto:mparker19@cogeco.ca). (As an aside, this count will be Martin's 60<sup>th</sup> year of participating in a CBC. His first was in Brockville in 1962!)

### **Bird Bash:**

December – weekend of the **4 and 5th**

January – weekend of the **15 and 16th**

### **Bird Wing:**

The next Bird Wing meeting will be held the **4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of January, January 25, starting at 7:00 p.m.** I will let you know well in advance if it will be a Zoom or non-Zoom meeting, and if non-Zoom, where it will be held.