

Bird Wing Report



January 2023



A little birdie
told me

Upcoming Events

Great Backyard Bird Count: The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a global bird count that takes place over four days, **February 17 to 20**. All you need to do is watch birds for a minimum of 15 minutes, even just once, over the four days and report your sightings to eBird. If you are already on eBird, you just enter your sightings as usual. If you are not on eBird, you can create a free account for the four days.

You can watch for birds as long and as often as you want. You don't need to stick to 15 minutes and you don't need to stick to your backyard.

For more information see: <https://www.birdcount.org/participate/>. You can even join a webinar about the GBBC on **Wednesday, February 15, from 1:00 to 2:00**. Click on **Register for Webinar** in the link above if interested.

Last year, the Great Backyard Bird Count yielded 7,299 species worldwide, with the most species observed in Colombia, Ecuador, India, Brazil and Peru. A total of 253 countries participated. In Canada, 255 species were reported, putting us in 38th place, quite remarkable considering we are a winter country at that time of the year. However, we were third highest when it came to lists submitted – 29,335 – after the United States and India!

There are not many of us here in our immediate districts of Nipissing and Parry Sound on eBird and so our participant numbers aren't high. Think about joining and setting up an account. It is free for the four days of the GBBC.

Bird Bash: Fortunately this year, our monthly Bird Bash takes place the same weekend as the Great Backyard Bird Count, **the weekend of February 18 and 19**. So all the sightings you observe that weekend can be entered in the Great Backyard Bird Count.

Bird Wing: The next Bird Wing meeting takes place by **Zoom on Tuesday, February 28**, the last day of February. Fred Pinto will be talking to us about his **trip to the Antarctica** and showing us some great photos of the various penguins he saw. Always fascinating to hear about a continent most of us will never see.

Birds Seen in January

Boreal Chickadee:

Following a very successful January Bird Bash in which 42 species were seen – the second highest January number since 2007 when 43 species were seen – it certainly was not difficult for most to name two species seen this month. And although some unusual birds were seen, the top sighting has to go to the Boreal Chickadee, first spotted by Faye Oie at Sue Gratton's place, thanks to Faye's dog, Tess.

It wasn't long before Sue returned from Toronto and crouched in the snow, waiting for an hour to get a photo of the bird. When it is a lifer as it was for Faye and Sue and some others, that is what one does! Sue's photo is below.



Every now and then a Boreal is spotted within our 80.5 km circle. I believe the last time one was spotted by a Bird Wing member on a Bird Bash, was one seen during the February 2021 Bird Bash, seen by Gary and Connie Sturge on Forest Lake Road.

Other Boreal Chickadee sightings in the South River/Sundridge area included two by Martin Parker, on Eagle Lake Road in 2007 and at Stephen O'Donnell's home in February 2013. More recently, Dan Burton saw one in South River in May

2020. And back in 1985, Donald Sutherland saw one on the famed Peacock Road, the road of the Blackbacked Woodpeckers and the Spruce Grouse.

Recent sightings in Nipissing District were by Scott Dewey in March 2019 on Nosbonsing Park Road when it even came to Scott's hand to eat, photo at right, as well as in West Ferris at his place around the same time – it followed him home?? - and also by Lori Anderson at Sunset Park circa 2016-17 and by Buddy Myles at Cache Bay in November 2018. Scott also saw one in Warren in February 2021. Those Boreals sure do like him!



Scott Dewey

Josh Vandermeulen, a biologist who saw 342 species during his 2012 Ontario Big Year, saw the Boreal three times at Bruman Quarry off Carmichael Drive – October 2014, May 2015, and July 2018.

And in the distant past, the Boreal was seen in East Ferris in December 1989 at the boat launch at the end of McPherson Drive and in April 1990 in the Wasing Road area, Chisholm Township.

Other members who saw the Boreal at Sue's were me, Dick Tafel, **Linda Stoner whose photo is on the cover of this report**, Stephen O'Donnell and Grant McKercher. The bird was a lifer for me, Linda and Grant. I can't quite describe the excitement of seeing a lifer within our own birding area. More intense I think than seeing one outside our birding circle.

Other Birds Seen:

Faye Oie: In addition to the Boreal Chickadee, Faye saw a raft of Wild Turkeys crossing Eagle Lake Road in front of her car! It's been an exciting month for you, Faye!

Denise Desmarais: Denise has a couple of Canada Jays (at right) hanging around her "camp" area near Field. Dick and I saw one on Sturgeon Lake Road in the Mattawa area. I don't think anyone else reported seeing Canada Jays. They can be quite elusive!

Denise also saw Pine Grosbeaks at her camp feeder. Others who are seeing Pine Grosbeaks are new member, Garry Waldram, as well as Gary and Connie. A few also come to my feeder at least a couple of times a week.

Therez Violette: Therez continues to have a male Northern Cardinal coming to her Sturgeon Falls feeder. Rick Tripp has a pair near his Callander home, a male and a female. I believe this is at least the third year they have been coming to Rick's area.

Therez also has a Common Redpoll coming to her feeder. There are not many around this winter so far, but Grant McKercher has 1 to 3 coming to his feeder most days and a large flock was seen by Gary and Connie on Hazel Glen Road during the Bird Bash. Lori once had a large flock at her place.

Sue Gratton: Sue's two birds were Evening Grosbeaks, which seem to be the prominent grosbeak this winter, and a Redbreasted Nuthatch, a new bird coming to Sue's feeders this winter.



Renee Levesque

Grant McKercher: Grant is getting many Pine Siskins, as is Dick, at their feeders. They seem few and far between this winter, so it's interesting both are getting gregarious flocks of them while some of us do without!

Grant also had a Northern Shrike (at right) in his yard and Dick and I saw one on Stewart Road during January's Bird Bash.

Stephen O'Donnell: Stephen has a Barred Owl coming to his yard every evening – sometimes it is also there in the morning. Garry W has also had one near his Rutherglen home. Jérémie Corbeil, our young and very keen member, saw one on January 1, and coincidentally on that date Faye heard one! I think maybe a good omen for their birding this year – playing out quite nicely for you, Faye, so far!

Stephen has also seen and taken many photos of the Bald Eagle at the Sturgeon Falls landfill site. Many hang around all the landfill sites in the winter and have been seen by a few of us. However, one flew along the Mattawa River during the Bird Bash and was seen by Garry W and by Dick and me.



Grant McKercher



Lori Anderson: Lori saw a large flock of Snow Buntings (at left) at her place and Garry W saw a smaller flock at the Lion's Club on the Mattawa River. But he also saw a large drift of at least 50 on Peddlers Drive. (I think drift is such an appropriate name for a flock of Snow Buntings.)

Lori also reported on the number of House Sparrows at her place, "poached" there by Gary and Connie, Dick, Linda Stoner and

Garry Waldram

me! (We drove into her yard to see them. Dick, who loves the House Sparrow, would never allow us to truly poach them!)

However, probably because Lori was hampered by her not being able to speak to us due to her Zoom technical difficulties, she did not mention what I consider to be her great find, a Northern Goshawk (below) that she and Ken saw on the Wasi Lake trails during the Bird Bash. It has been a couple of years since many of us have seen a Northern Goshawk, but Lori reports she saw many snowshoe hare tracks in the woods, so maybe this winter some of us will finally see one again.



Lori Anderson

Gary Sturge: Gary's two birds were the Song Sparrow, one coming to a feeder on Hazel Glen Road and seen by Gary and Connie during the Bird Bash, and the American Tree seen at the same feeder also during the Bird Bash. Gary also has one coming to his feeders and I have two. Jérémie saw one on January 1, I believe at his feeders.



Renee Levesque

Fred Pinto: Fred's two birds were the Downy Woodpecker and the Blue Jay (at left). Not many Blue Jays around this winter compared to other winters, but the seed crop was poor this winter, and as witnessed by Sheldon McGregor, a strong south migration took place as a result.

Connie Sturge: Connie's two birds were Mourning Doves, a regular flock or dule of which are at her Powassan home, and a Rough-legged Hawk she and Gary saw on Chiswick Line during the Bird Bash. Dick and I saw one on Maple Road just before the Bird Bash, so it could have been one and the same. A great hawk to see!

Jérémie Corbeil: Jérémie saw American Goldfinches at his feeders, a species seen by some others, but Jérémie was the only one to report the lovely Brown Creeper, seen in his yard.

Rick Tripp: Rick has two species, among others, coming to his feeders, the Hairy Woodpecker and a pair of White-breasted Nuthatches. I also recently had a pair, the male with its darker cap, the female with her lighter more grayish cap.

Renee Levesque: I saw a Red-tailed Hawk on Hwy 11 S. near Purdon Line, also seen there by Linda Stoner and Dick. Lori saw one at her place, I believe more than once. I also saw a Red-breasted Merganser (below) on the Ottawa River during the Bird Bash, also seen then by Lori and Ken and later by Garry W.



Stephen O'Donnell

Garry Waldram: Garry saw Common Goldeneye on the Ottawa River during the Bird Bash, as did Dick, me, Lori and Ken. Dick and I also saw quite a number of them at the Mattawa Lagoon earlier in January, and Jérémie saw one fly over his

East Ferris home during the Bird Bash – distinctive in flight because of their white wing patches. Garry’s second bird was the Pileated Woodpecker.

Linda Conway: Linda’s bird was the Black-capped Chickadee, our faithful bird seen all year round! Dick and I ran into Linda at Kraus’s store in Powassan where she was buying suet and Dick and I were buying bird seed. Always nice to meet a member in person.

Rachel Sturge: Rachel was talking to us from her home in Toronto and gave quite an interesting tale of a Cooper’s Hawk (at right), quite topical here because Diane Deagle saw one at Sweetman’s Gardens during the Bird Bash.

Rachel’s tale: I was stopped at a red traffic light at a busy intersection in North York where there were lots of pedestrians. While stopped there, I watched an epic battle between a Cooper’s Hawk and a mouse that involved two low flights across the intersection that barely missed a car, then several dives into bushes, followed by hopping out into the open and even more dives, and finally a successful catch, with the Cooper’s sitting in the open eating its catch! If that in and of itself wasn’t an amazing sight to watch in a busy intersection while in my car, the other amazing thing was not one single pedestrian that I could see even took in this epic battle of life and death despite dozens of people walking within a metre of it all.



Ybou photos, Wikipedia

This disregard could become a discussion in and of itself. (As an aside, Rachel saw three Red-tailed Hawks the next day after her Cooper’s Hawk incident, all in close proximity to one another, and it seemed there again, no one noticed them!)

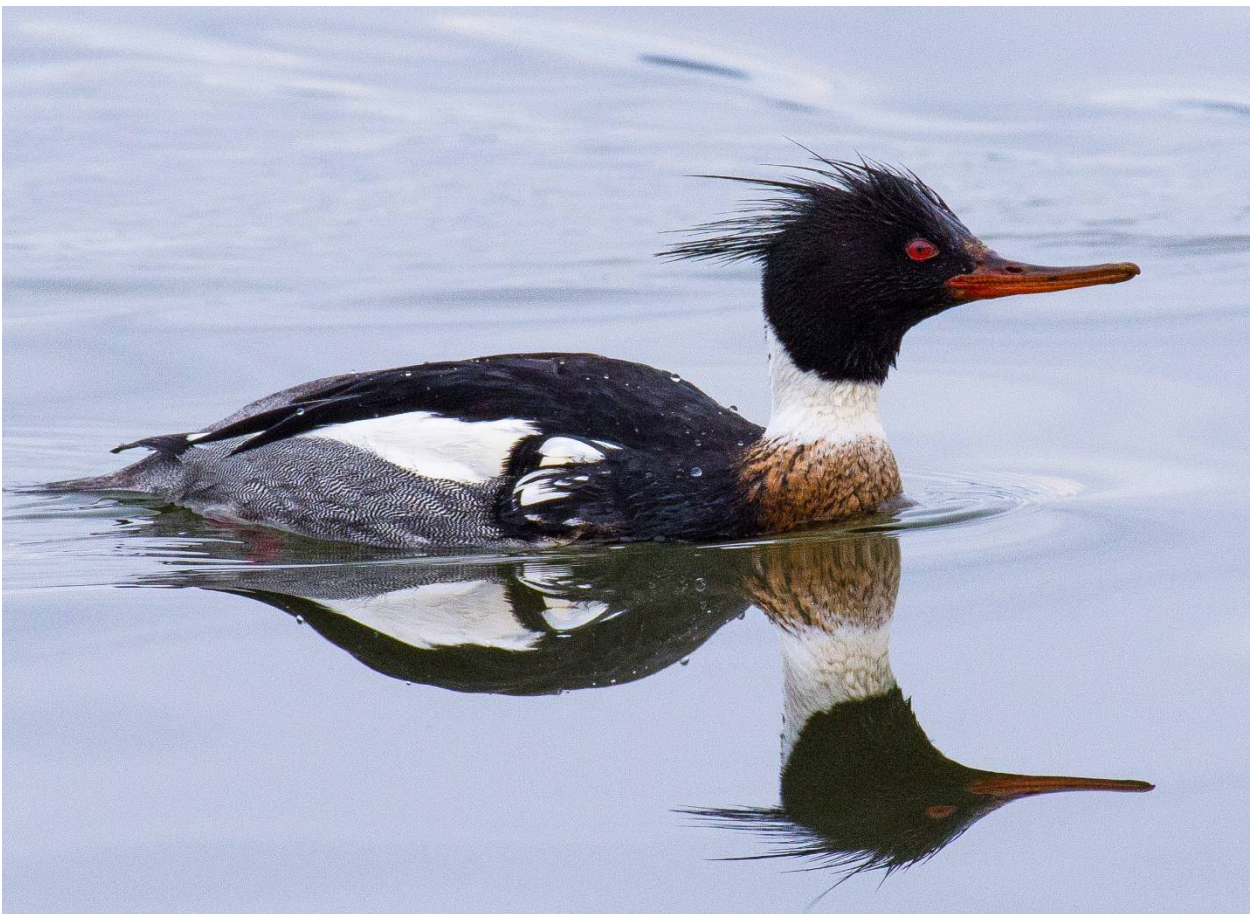
Sheldon McGregor: Sheldon was speaking to us from Ancaster while his screen showed a photo of himself and a Pileated Woodpecker from Thunder Cape. Some of you may recall Sheldon’s excellent talk on Thunder Cape at our Bird Wing

Zoom meeting in November 2021, and featured in the Bird Wing Report of November 2021, starting on page 12. If not, the article in the report is worth reading and is available on the Nipissing Naturalists Club's website at: <https://www.nipnats.com/bird-wing/> - then click on Meeting/Outing Reports.

Sheldon too saw a Cooper's Hawk and also a murmuration of European Starlings, both of which we have seen here. One bird Sheldon mentioned that he heard in Ancaster and that we sometimes get here, but not often, is the Carolina Wren.

Dick Tafel: Dick saw a Herring Gull on the Ottawa River, as did I. Stephen saw 6 at the Sturgeon Falls landfill site and 2 at the Sundridge landfill site, and Faye saw one at the South River landfill site.

Dick also mentioned he saw a couple of Common Mergansers (below) on January 3 in the small amount of open water on Lake Bernard.



Buddy Myles

Other birds mentioned after the fact: Bohemian Waxwings, a flock of 39, were watched by Dick and me in Birchhaven and Grant has had some at and near his place in Callander. A Brown Thrasher, present at Mary Young's feeder for some time now and seen on the Christmas Bird Count, was seen by Dick and me, eating ground seeds along with a Common Grackle. And, of course, there were American Crows, of which there are many this winter, and Common Ravens seen by most of us. Faye related an interesting story of how the raven near her place does not like her or Tess. Once without being aware of the situation, Faye and Tess were walking down one of her wooded paths probably around the time the young were hatched and the raven went after Tess and would not let Faye and Tess pass. That's how protective parents act when danger is present, even perceived danger!

Outside Our Area: Two birders we know, Michael Arthurs and Craig Evans, travelled to Manitoulin Island to see the Lewis's Woodpecker, a rare bird for Ontario that makes its home out west. Craig's photo is at right.

Stephen O'Donnell reports 12 previous sightings in Ontario and Sheldon, who often takes the time to travel in Ontario to see rare birds, did not make the 7-hour trip because he saw one near Trenton in 2002. Sheldon says he has to choose carefully where he goes depending on distance and whether he has already seen the bird. Some in our Bird Wing group (Dick and Stephen I know for sure) may have seen the Lewis's out west.

- *Renee Levesque*



East Ferris Nest Box Project

Our youngest member, J r mie Corbeil, spoke to members about his project, the East Ferris Nest Project, “a fun conservation project to help in the local conservation of our bird life.” It involves the building of nest boxes for 7 species local to East Ferris – the Wood Duck, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, American Kestrel, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Northern Flicker and Eastern Bluebird. Quite the project for a keen 12-year old birder to take on!



Stephen O'Donnell

Specifications for the nest boxes can be found on J r mie’s Facebook group site: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/469199795227420/>. If you wish to participate, you can join the group and post photos of your nest boxes or photos/videos of anything related to local birding. You can also leave comments and ask questions.

Nest box plans and other information about nest boxes can also be found at: <https://nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses/>.

Stephen O’Donnell mentioned that for the past 15 years he has had a Common Merganser in a nest box he built on his lakeside property (seen at left). Stephen also has built and put up four American Kestrel nest boxes, 3 on Forest Lake Road that are occupied each year and one at the corner of Purdon Line and Maple Hill, replacing one which got damaged when

part of the tree it was on fell.

And then there is the nest box Lloyd Sparks built to specification for a Barred Owl (right), only a Northern Saw-whet decided it wanted it as its home instead.

- Renee Levesque



Lloyd Sparks

The wild Bird Bashes of January

Last year sometime, Jade Prevost-Manuel emailed Nipissing Naturalists Club asking if there were to be any birding activities scheduled in our area in January 2023. She was writing an article on winter activities in Northern Ontario for the Winter 2023 edition of *ON Nature*. Rick Tripp sent her email to me and Dick Tafel. Dick asked me if there was anything on tap and although I couldn't think of anything at first, it then came to mind – Bird Bash is our first outdoor birding activity of 2023.

So I emailed Jade and told her about our monthly Bird Bashes, January's in particular, and what we might likely find. I gave her Dick's email address so she could interview him, which she subsequently did.



Dick Tafel and Paul Smylie, by Renee Levesque

The result of this: On page 18 of *ON Nature*, Jade wrote an article entitled “How to Spend a Wild Winter Up North”, and, as all you Bird Bash participants know, if there is heavy snow and blowing, howling winds in January, it certainly can be a wild time finding those few species that stay around for January. But we have never wavered and in the 19 years Dick has been our compiler, we have ventured out on our quest no matter sleet, snow, ice pellets, or white-out conditions – whatever nature throws at us!

Jade writes about winter activities in Algoma, Kenora, the St. Lawrence Forest, and Nipissing. The section on Nipissing is entitled “Winter Birding in Nipissing.” She writes, “Tafel and his fellow members of Bird Wing, the birding branch of Nipissing Naturalists Club, have been exploring the district's avian fauna on organized outings for 20 years. These excursions – or bird bashes as club members call them – happen once a month shine or snow.” Jade then goes on to write that visitors can head to Laurier Woods Conservation Area to walk the trails and find birds.

- *Renee Levesque*

Bird of the Year, 2023

On December 10, 2022, the American Birding Association announced that the 2023 Bird of the Year is a female Belted Kingfisher. (For 2022, the bird of the year was the Pileated Woodpecker.)

The Belted Kingfisher may be a stocky, large-headed bird with a ragged crest and a piercing rattle, but it is one of the few species in which the female is more colourful than the male. Females have a rusty red band across their bellies that is lacking in the males. (The males have a less colourful slate-blue band.) Females are similar in size to the males and can dive to catch their prey as effortlessly as the males. Colourful, strong and agile: Can't ask for much better.

Most of us have seen kingfishers hovering over water with their rapid wing beats, searching for their food before plunging head-first into the water, spearing their prey with their bill. This past summer, while on an outing at Cache Bay, some of us watched three of them doing just that.

Kingfishers' main diet is, of course, fish, but they will also eat crayfish, shellfish, insects, frogs, snakes and lizards, and even a small bird, mammals and berries.

It is not a species that stays here during the winter, but migrates south to areas in which there is open water. It's rare that we see one here in December for the Christmas Bird Count. However, during the 2021 Christmas Bird Count, April McCrum spotted one on her Trout Lake CBC survey route, a first ever on our CBC! (A portend perhaps that it would become Bird of the Year.)

I think it's time in 2023 to focus on the female species of a bird and in this case the female Belted Kingfisher, also known by the delightful name of Queenfisher!

- *Renee Levesque*



On the Wing Photography, Mia McPherson