

# Bird Wing Report

January 2025



## Birding Events

**Bird Wing:** There will not be a January meeting of Bird Wing. Instead, we will return to our regular meeting schedule on **Tuesday, February 28, starting at 7:00 pm.** Meeting will be a Zoom meeting, with the link being sent closer to the date of the meeting. It should be an interesting meeting with each participant from the birding trip to Honduras telling us about their highlights!



**Great Backyard Bird Count:** The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) takes place **February 14 to 17, over our Family Day weekend.** This is a global event sponsored by Birds Canada, Cornell Lab, Audubon and Wild Birds Unlimited, a “time when the world comes together to celebrate birds,” no matter your birding ability or your level of bird interest. And it does not cost anything to participate.



You watch birds for 15 minutes or more at least once during the 4 days of the GBBC; identify the birds you see or hear; and then enter your sightings on eBird or Merlin. If you already use eBird or Merlin, just enter your sightings as usual. There is no need to register or sign up separately. If you are new, you can download for free Merlin Bird ID or eBird for the period of the GBBC. For instructions, see: <https://www.birdcount.org/participate/>.

**Bird Bash:** February’s Bird Bash will be held during the weekend of the Great Backyard Bird Count, on **February 15–16.** This will allow us to also use our Bird Bash sightings towards the GBBC. And because it takes place over the Family Day weekend, Bird Bash provides a good opportunity to not only gather our own data and the data for GBBC, but also to enjoy birding as a Family Weekend activity.



## Seeds and Cones

**Snowy Owl:** In the latter part of December, Garry Waldram saw a Snowy Owl in Chisholm Township, also seen by Lori Anderson. **Garry's photo of it that first day he saw it is on this month's cover.** Garry saw it one or two times after his first sighting, but then one day after New Year's, he found it dead in a field about 25 feet from the road. Garry took the owl's body home to freeze it and has now donated it to Oriana Pokorny, Nipissing University.

**Ontario Bird of the Year for 2023:** In the *Ontario Birds* magazine of August 2024, it was determined that Sturgeon Falls' Fieldfare was the Ontario Bird of the Year for 2023. Many of us saw this Northern European bird during the period from November 29 to December 15. It had been seen only three times before in Ontario, in Ottawa in 1967, Long Point in 1975, and in Toronto in 1981. Stephen O'Donnell and others also saw it in Quebec near the Ontario border in 1976. It is not often we get a mega bird in our district. Linda Stoner's photo of our mega Sturgeon bird is at right.

**Lifers:** Garry Waldram saw another lifer, though not in our area. When he was in Ottawa in early December, he saw a Red-throated Loon.



Linda Stoner



Greg Jaski

**Quelle surprise!** When back in early December Greg Jaski looked out his Beaverton window into his backyard, he was surprised and delighted that an Eastern Screech-Owl had taken up residence in the house that Greg built! Greg set up his camera on his tripod and took a photo of it from his window so as not to disturb the owl. Greg's photo is at left.

**Project FeederWatch:** For the 2023-2024 Project FeederWatch season, every region except BC reported the Black-capped Chickadee as the top bird. No surprises there! In BC, the Dark-eyed Junco was the top bird. After 25 years at Birds Canada, Kerrie Wilcox who led Project

FeederWatch and the Great Backyard Bird Count has moved on to new adventures. I will miss Kerrie. I met her once when I was at Birds Canada and she showed me around the building, introducing me to many who worked there. There was rarely a year we weren't in touch over some bird-related matter. She was, without fail, always very helpful.

**A very unusual feeding:** I received a photo and text from Steve Pitt describing what I think is quite unusual, a Red-winged Blackbird feeding a young Blue Jay last August! Reports Steve: "Mama Red-winged Blackbird led her young to a block of suet where she attempted to demonstrate self-feeding. But the youngsters would have none of it, begging mom to feed them instead. Mom caved in and when a very young Blue Jay noticed what was happening, he decided he wanted to be fed too. Mama Red-wing ignored him at first, but her maternal instincts must have kicked in for she began feeding the Blue Jay too." Rather amazing, I think! Steve's photo is at right.



Steve Pitt

**Wisdom does it again!** In early December, a 74-year-old Laysan Albatross, named Wisdom, laid an egg at the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge! Midway is part of the Hawaiian archipelago and home to the largest colony of albatross in the world. At least 2 to 3 million arrive on these breeding grounds each year. Wisdom, tagged as Z333 in 1956 at around the age of 5, is the oldest known wild bird in the world. (The average age for Laysan Albatross is 12 to 40 years.) She has had more than 30 chicks in her lifetime so far. Her last chick was hatched in 2021. (Photo by the US Fish and Wildlife Service at right is of Wisdom with her newly hatched chick in 2011.)

Albatross parents share in incubation and feeding duties and generally mate for life. However,





because Wisdom has outlived all other Laysan Albatross, she has had at least 3 mates. She arrived at the breeding grounds this year with a new partner. Her last mate, Akeakamai, had not been seen in several years.

There is a 70 to 80% chance Wisdom's egg will hatch. Because Wisdom has captured the attention of people worldwide, they await with bated breath to see if this egg will hatch in approximately early February. Stay tuned.

**Out-of-season Birds:** Grant and Shirley McKercher continue to have a White-throated Sparrow at their Callander feeder and now Linda Conway has one at her place in Nipissing Village; Dick Tafel and I saw an American Robin by the Mattawa Sewage Lagoon on January 4; and Garry Waldram saw a Canada Goose in Bonfield on January 8.



**A Christmas visitor:** Wild Turkeys seem to have an uncanny ability to make their presence known on special turkey days. You may recall that one showed up at Steve Pitt's home and Ed Rawley's property for Thanksgiving. And now one strutted its stuff at Grant and Shirley McKercher's on Christmas Eve and stayed through until December 27, eventually finding its way onto the feeding platform! Preferably there than in the oven! (I don't mean to be turkeyist, but it looks rather ridiculous up on that platform!) Grant's photo is at left.

*-Renee Levesque*

**Grant McKercher**

## Sweetman's Gardens Council Meeting

*By Linda Stoner*

On December 10, Liza Vandermeer, Maddy Young and Sam Wolfe did a wonderful Power Point presentation to North Bay City Council regarding the recent clear-cut by the City adjacent to Sweetman's Gardens. The presentation included a discussion of the benefits of the Gardens – for plants, animals, birds and people – and a history of the Gardens that were started by Murray Sweetman 64 years ago. Today the gardens are maintained by volunteers at no cost to the City of North Bay.



*Courtesy of CJ*

The presenters also pointed out that the garden is self-sufficient. No artificial pesticides or weed killers are used, plants are chosen based on what will thrive in local conditions, with no extra watering required, and the compost is made onsite. They also discussed future plans for the Gardens that will include resuming the children's programming, a veggie patch, and more.

The councillors had many questions afterwards, all very positive. Councillor Justine Mallah will act as liaison with the City of North Bay staff regarding the future of Sweetman's Garden.

Councillor Chris Mayne reported that the clear-cut was not intended to encroach on Sweetman's Gardens. In fact, he said that if there is a silver lining, thanks to this presentation, it has revitalized the passion and interest of so many people, including city councillors, about how we feel about Sweetman's Gardens!

Mayor Peter Chirico thanked the interested citizens in attendance – at least 50 supporters – and ended the presentation by saying, "I think you've got some attention. Certainly, discussions with staff will be forthcoming and I thank you for your presentation for your neighborhoods, for our City, for our children."

*Note: According to eBird, some 74 species of birds have been seen in Sweetman's Gardens!*



## Our 46<sup>th</sup> year and counting!

*By Renee Levesque with Lori Anderson, compiler, and Angela Mills, keeper of the dashboard data*



*Linda Stoner*

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is our biggest birding event of the year and one we look forward to, never knowing what birds we may see or what the weather may hold or whether the lakes will be free of ice or completely frozen. As is often the case, it turned cold just around the time of our Count Day, December 14, freezing up Lake Nipissing, but thankfully keeping many parts of Trout Lake open.

With hoar frost evident in some areas, our Count Day was an especially beautiful winter wonderland as witnessed by Linda Stoner's photo at the heading of this article. However, there was also a wall of fog on Trout Lake making it impossible until it lifted to scan the lake to find ducks and possibly a Common Loon.

As was the case during last year's CBC, field observers discovered 38 species, but perhaps in part because there were more field observers this year, 21, up from last year's 17, we had a higher count of birds, 2,844 compared to 2,528 last year.



Once again, feeder watchers, 32 of them, came through with additional species, two this year, to bring the total number of species seen during this year's count to 40, down one from last year's 41.

What were the two additional species seen by feeder watchers that were not seen in the field? – a White-throated Sparrow seen by Shirley McKercher at her Callander feeder and 10 Pine Siskins (at right) seen at feeders in East Ferris and West Ferris.

Besides the Pine Siskins and 142 American Goldfinch, 91 of which were seen at feeders, finch numbers were almost non-existent. Not seen at all were Purple Finch, Redpolls, Red Crossbills and White-winged Crossbills. Even the siskin and goldfinch numbers were down from last year. We saw 61 siskins and 209 goldfinches in 2023.



*Renee Levesque*



*Greg Jaski*

However, Evening Grosbeak numbers were up from 35 in 2023 to 83 this year, more than half seen at feeders. Pine Grosbeaks (at left), on the other hand, were down, from 11 in 2023 to 5 this year. All 5 were found in the field. (As an aside, except for count day and count week, I have had a Pine Grosbeak in my yard every day. Obviously it did not want to be counted – or maybe Area 2 field observers saw it.)

The White-throat was the only other sparrow besides the Tree Sparrow, 5 of which were found by field observers and



15 found by feeder watchers for a total of 20; also included with the sparrows is the Dark-eyed Junco, 3 found by field observers. Last year, there were 12 Tree Sparrows and one junco observed, so although a few more of each this year, basically not much of a difference.



Linda Stoner

An all-time high was the number of Wild Turkeys (at left), 11 found in the field and 15 found by a feeder watcher in Callander, for a total of 26! Quite the increase from last year when not one was seen! In fact, we have never done well turkey-wise. There were only two other years any were seen, 2 in 2021 and 2 in 2022.

Black-capped Chickadees made themselves very well known. We counted 1,102 of our faithful little bird as opposed to 637 last year. But our all-time high count was in 2001 when we counted 3192 of them.

A species totally absent this year was the Bohemian Waxwing. We missed their “jaunty berets and knowledge of Proust” as

Iain Wilkes said in his Carleton Place CBC report, or as Dick Tafel always says, “their Parisian hair-dos”.

Last year was a good year with 54 seen, but our highest count was in 1997 when 1,757 were seen.

Another all-time high this year at 25 was the Bald Eagle (photo at right), 23 of them seen at the East Ferris Landfill Site. Last



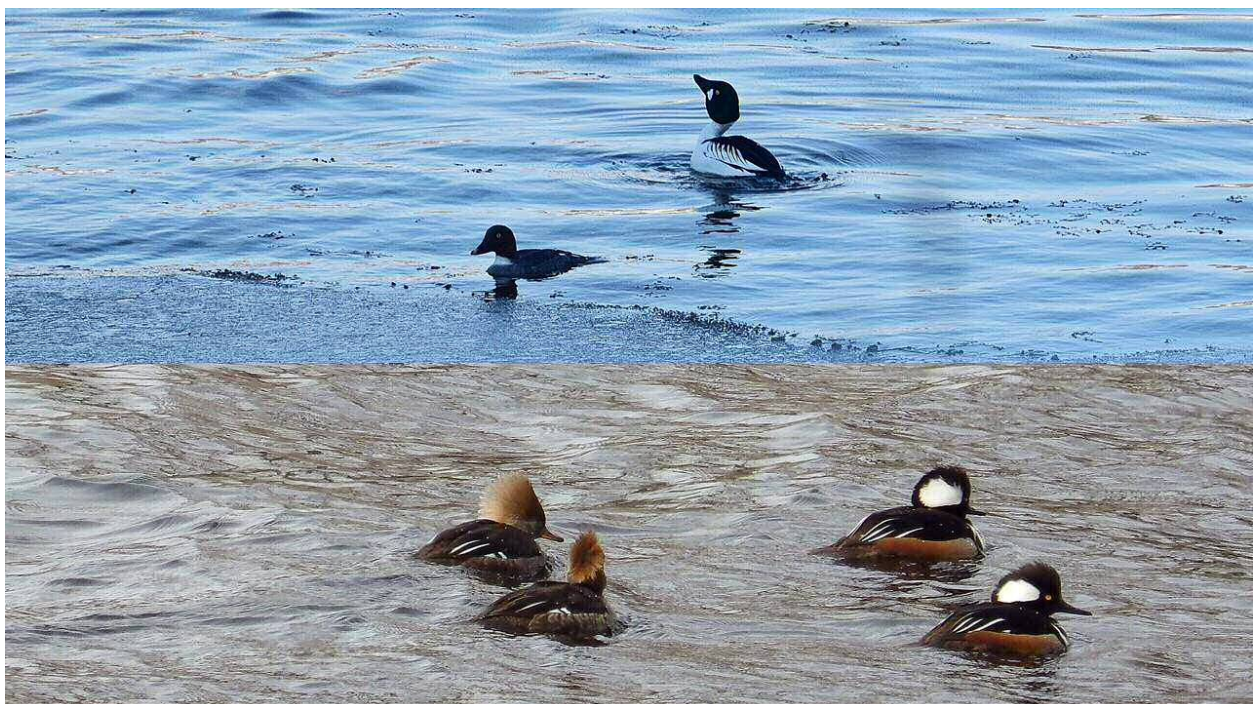
Stephen O'Donnell

year about half that number, 11 were seen, with only 7 seen at the East Ferris Landfill Site. We counted 23 in 2019, the record high until this year.

Last year, the Northern Goshawk was our hawk of the Count. This year, it had to be the Cooper's Hawk found near the Callander dock, although we have seen one in other years – 1989, 1999, 2002, 2005 and 2016. The Cooper's was not the only hawk to be found. Also observed was the Red-tailed Hawk, not seen last year, and the Rough-legged Hawk, one also seen last year, again in Area 6.

Two birds have made their way into our Count over the years, the Northern Cardinal and the Red-bellied Woodpecker, not many of each, but a few. Only 2 cardinals were seen this year compared with 6 last year, quite a bit down from our high counts of 15 in 2003 and 13 in 2012. We had two Red-bellied Woodpeckers this year, one at Mary Young's feeder and one seen by field observers at a feeder in Pinewood subdivision. None were seen last year, but 3 were seen in 2003.

Ducks in Trout Lake and Mallards also in Chippewa Creek did not disappoint. Mallards at just over 300 were at about the same number as last year; Hooded Mergansers (below with Common Goldeneye) were up by 2, from 3 to 5; Common Mergansers were up by a lot, from 6 to 21; and Common Goldeneye, down by 9, from 44 to 35. Common Loons and Canada Geese were not found this year.



*Composite photo by Renee Levesque*



No Ring-billed Gulls were seen, but 8 Herring Gulls were observed, down 3 from last year.

Out-of-season birds seen, in addition to the White-throated Sparrow, were 2 Common Grackles and a Belted Kingfisher, tying our record set in 2021 when one kingfisher was also seen. Last year, there was one American Robin, this year none.

The numbers of each woodpecker seen were more or less the same as last year except for the Hairy Woodpecker whose number increased from 28 in 2023 to 70 this year!



*Renee Levesque*

Blue Jay numbers also remained basically the same. One Canada Jay (at left) was seen this year, same as last. American Crow numbers were up from 86 last year to 111 this year, and Common Raven numbers greatly up from 116 to 325!

Northern Shrike numbers at 2 were the same as last year and Brown Creeper numbers were down only by one, from 3 to 2. Snow Buntings were not seen last year, but 5 were seen this year.

Red-breasted Nuthatches were greatly down from last year, from 43 to 12, but White-breasted Nuthatches were up, from 27 to 43. In 2005, 198 Red-breasted Nuthatches were observed, so numbers are greatly down from then.

European Starling and Rock Pigeon numbers were basically the same, but Mourning Dove numbers were up greatly, from 18 to 43, as were Ruffed Grouse

numbers, from 6 to 19. Our high count for Mourning Doves was in 1998 when 295 were seen and our high count for Ruffed Grouse (below) was in 2000 when 80 were seen.



Stephen O'Donnell

Owls were absent this year, although the day after the count a Snowy Owl was seen on Lake Nipissing and a Barred Owl was seen in Laurier Woods, both counted as Count Week birds.

A collage of photos of some of the field observers follows, as does a report on our tally lunch party, a report by Garry Waldram on his first CBC, and the results of the Burk's Falls CBC.

The last words are fittingly from Lori Anderson, our tireless compiler who made sure we received lots of publicity with three articles appearing in *Bay Today*:

“Congratulations to all! Thank

you so much for your contributions. It is so rewarding to compile and submit such hard-earned results.”

*Note: Numbers after 2023 are based on raw data from our CBC dashboard and not normalized data which takes into account effort.*







## Tally lunch party

*By Renee Levesque*

Turns out it was fortuitous that we couldn't book 176 Lakeshore for the evening of the actual Christmas Bird Count, December 14. Instead of a tally dinner party, we had a tally lunch party at 176 Lakeshore on December 15, and the consensus was, "Let's always have a tally lunch the next day!" Although field observers are often a jolly bunch of counters even at night after a long day of counting, we were less tired the next day and, thus, even jollier! Hard to imagine, but true! And, as always, there was an abundance of pot luck food, including two or three different soups.

With the exception of three field observers, everyone else attended the tally lunch party. And because it was held during the day, southerners Sue Gratton and Stephen O'Donnell were able to attend.

Our very special guest was Gary Sturge accompanied by Connie. Gary didn't have to worry about those on his old route, Area 5, not doing a good job. They – Stephen, Sue, Angela Mills, Rachel Sturge and Nanda Cortes - actually started their count with a bang by seeing a Cooper's Hawk and a Belted Kingfisher at Callander's government dock!



And, yes, Gary, they did get to East Ferris Landfill Site and counted all the Common Ravens (left) and Bald Eagles with excellent numbers. Our Area 6 group, Dick Tafel, Linda Stoner and I, saw 11 Wild Turkeys, but we had to give 10 to your Area 5 group, Gary, because we saw them just as we crossed into Area 5. I imagined you during tallys gone by, looking way too gleeful taking our 10 birds to add to your already large list.

*Stephen O'Donnell*



Grant and Shirley McKercher were our West Ferris field observers and it seems to me that West Ferris never disappoints during the CBC. Two years ago, Grant and Shirley saw 40 Bohemian Waxwings there. None were reported at all this CBC, but Grant and Shirley saw a Common Grackle and a Northern Shrike (at right) this year in West Ferris, a shrike also seen by Area 5 field observers and the grackle also seen in the Corbeil area by feeder watcher, Mary Young.



*Grant McKercher*

Garry Waldram took part in a CBC for the first time as a field observer and now that he has had his first experience, we hope to encourage him to either reinstate the old Mattawa route or start up a new one in Calvin Township. Last year,

Angela wrote an article on what it was like to be a first time CBCer, but now that she is an old hand, the honour this year goes to Garry. His article follows this one.



*Renee Levesque*

Area 2 observers, Brent and Laura Turcotte, along with Karen Major who wasn't in attendance, headed north and saw 34 Evening Grosbeaks (one at left), the only field observers to see any! However, 47 Evening Grosbeaks were seen by feeder watchers!

Greg Jaski, the only field observer to see Pine Grosbeaks, brought along to the tally lunch his 92-year old mother who takes part as a feeder watcher each year. After the tally lunch, Dick and I ran into Greg beside his mom's home where he pointed out an immature female Snowy Owl on one of the Three Sisters Rocks on Lake Nipissing,

an owl he saw on the day of the tally lunch. Unfortunately, the Snowy could not be counted as a CBC bird, but is counted as a Count Week bird.

Fred Pinto also saw an owl that morning, a Barred Owl in Laurier Woods. It too could not be counted as a CBC bird, but is counted as a Count Week bird.



Renee Levesque

Paul Smylie wasn't able to attend, but April McCrum reported on their side of the Trout Lake route, Area 7. It was three years ago, in 2021, that April saw a Belted Kingfisher in this area (photo at left). That was our very first kingfisher for our CBC and the one this year that Area 5 observers saw, our second.

Before we got to the actual tally with compiler Lori Anderson and her assistant, Ken Gowing, who is also my number one fan in terms of my Christmas songs, we sang my Christmas bird song, "Jingle Bird Rock", led by Sue. I hope she can attend every year as long as I compose a song because she has a wonderful voice!

I shortened the song to just four verses to please Marc Buchanan. None of us will ever forget how he got impatient when we sang all 12 verses of the "Twelve Days of Christmas" during one of our CBC tallies at Grant and Shirley's home. I think that year was my first attempt at a Christmas bird song or poem. For Marc's sake, I have never written one as long since! The song, which is on the next page, is headed by a **joyful photo of Redpolls taken by Stephen.**

Before we even started our count, Linda Holmes, freelance writer, met with some of the field observers from Area 5 at 7:30 in the morning in Callander and wrote a great article for *Bay Today*, capturing well what we do and why we do it. Lori did an excellent job informing Linda of the history of the CBC. If you haven't yet seen the article, be sure to read it: <https://www.baytoday.ca/local-news/interesting-sightings-during-the-north-bay-christmas-bird-count-9960802>.





## JINGLE BIRD ROCK

*By Renee Levesque, with apologies to Heal and Boothe or Helms and Garland*

Jingle bird, jingle bird, jingle bird rock,  
Jingle bird fly and jingle bird flock.  
Goldfinch and Blue Jays and Redpolls are found  
Now the Christmas Bird Count's in town!

Jingle bird, jingle bird, jingle bird flock,  
Jingle birds flying in jingle bird time.  
Listening and watching in jingle count square  
In the frosty air!

What a bright time, it's the right time  
To count the day away.  
Jingle count time is a swell time  
For adding up the birds today!

Fly to me jingle bird, pick up your wings  
Jingle around the tree  
Mix and a-mingle with a jingling tweet  
That's the jingle bird, that's the jingle bird, that's the jingle bird rock!

# Very cold walks on my first CBC

*By Garry Waldram*

It was my first Christmas Bird Count and I was looking forward to taking part in it. What I wasn't expecting was the cold weather. I had volunteered to be a field observer and was asked to cover a few areas within Area 3.



*Garry Waldram*

My first stop was Laurier Woods and as I left the truck to walk the trails, the thermometer in my truck read minus 18! The first bird I found was a pair of Hairy Woodpeckers busily looking for food. It was so cold the Black-capped Chickadees weren't even calling and I found my first of many sitting in a tree facing the rising sun to warm up after a cold night. (Photo of one facing the sun at left.) Because of the cold, my walk through Laurier Woods was shorter than I had wanted it to be.

After my walk, I warmed up in the truck and grabbed a coffee before heading to the next area, North Bay's waterfront. However, the lake had begun to freeze over and most of the open water was gone. I drove along the waterfront from the Government Dock to Lee Park, stopping to look for birds at various locations. I found a plethora of Mallards in Chippewa Creek where it runs into Lake Nipissing.

I then did a quick walk around Amelia and Lee Parks and found a few more birds – chickadees, American Crows, European Starlings and White-breasted Nuthatches. By this point, I was chilled to the bone and still had one more area to cover, the trail along Chippewa Creek from Memorial Gardens through Fisher Street Park and back. I walked quickly, trying to stay warm.

It was a fun day despite the hardships the weather presented and I definitely will not forget my first Christmas Bird Count! I look forward to many more in the future.



## Burk's Falls CBC Highlights

*By Craig Evans, compiler, and Renee Levesque;  
with photos by Stephen O'Donnell*

The Burk's Falls Christmas Bird Count (CBC) took place on December 18. Some of our Bird Wing members, Stephen O'Donnell, Grant McKercher and Brent and Laura Turcotte, took part in it.

Because Lake Bernard had open water for Count Day and Count Week, this led to a nice diversity of waterfowl and some of this year's Christmas Bird Count highlights.

An adult male White-winged Scoter (photo below) was found, representing the first time this species was seen on the count. Three Long-tailed ducks were seen marking a new high count, surpassing the two found in 2001. Other waterfowl seen were 12 Common Goldeneye, a Bufflehead, 19 Common Mergansers and 2 Common Loons. For comparison, 30 goldeneye were seen in 2012; 12 Bufflehead were seen in 2015; 53 Common Mergansers were seen in 2001; and 4 Common Loons were seen in 2001.



*Stephen O'Donnell*



*Stephen O'Donnell*



Two Greater Scaup and a Hooded Merganser were seen on Lake Bernard in the following days and were added as Count Week birds.

Bald Eagles at 15 marked a new high count for this species, surpassing the 11 seen in 2018.

Two Belted Kingfishers marked another new high count. A single kingfisher had been seen previously in 5 separate years.

A Sharp-shinned Hawk was seen, representing the third time one has been included on the count. The only other hawk seen was a Red-tailed Hawk (photo at right).

A few other highlights were a male and a female Northern Cardinal, a first winter Glaucous Gull and a Barred Owl (at the heading). In terms of high counts, three cardinals were seen in 1995; 9 Glaucous Gulls were seen in 2011; and 2 Barred Owls in 2010.



*Stephen O'Donnell*

Herring Gulls were seen in good numbers, 75 of them, but far short of the 489 seen in 2011.

Pileated (8), Downy (21) and Hairy (32) Woodpeckers obviously made an appearance, although 2020 was an excellent year for Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers when 47 Downys and 94 Hairys were seen.

It was a quiet year for winter finches this CBC. Last year, we tallied 918 Pine Siskins and 486 Redpolls. This year we counted 40 Pine Siskins and no Redpolls. However, we did count 17 White-winged Crossbills, 15 more than last year. Our high count for White-winged Crossbills was in 1989 when 835 were seen! Pine and Evening Grosbeaks were also not seen this CBC.

Observers saw a total of 32 species, representing 2080 individuals. Last year, observers found the same number of species, but more individual birds, just over a thousand more, at 3,326.